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THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

VOL. II.

THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

BY

MORTIMER AND FRANCES COLLINS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

CHAPTER I.

GOSSIP.

Veluti in speculo.

NEXT morning, the air being dry and clear, it was pleasant to stroll about the gravel paths and watch the quiet life of the village. When Frowde gave himself a holiday the gift was a perfect one: the flight of the goosequill ceased; he deliberately lazed. After the meal—half lunch, half breakfast, which he called “prandium”—host and hostess and their two guests took

the morning easily. What did they see? Miss Tattleton's shop opposite: that lady's factotum, old John Brown, getting out surreptitiously through the orchard gate, and pricking his legs as he wound deviously through the furze to the Pleiades for beer (a trick of his half-a-dozen times daily), vainly imagining that he is unseen by his mistress; two huge furniture vans, red and gold, standing by the inn—for the carrying trade is busy just after quarter-day; a tall, well set-up man-servant, with iron-grey hair, coming from what Mr. Wemys used to call his postern-gate, and also making for the Pleiades; men digging sand upon the hill;—finally, four people coming home from morning prayers—for it is Passion Week—namely, old General Conway's wife and daughter, Mr. Perivale, and the ever-youthful Mrs. Lovelace. She makes straight to Miss Tattleton's in search of gos-

sip, thereby disappointing Mr. Perivale, who has set his heart on doing the very same thing.

Mrs. Biggins feeding her pigeons in front of the Pleiades—so tame that they fly up to her hand—looks picturesque. It was a brilliant morning, and, as one of the Misses Conway remarked to Manly Frowde when passing his gate, it was strange to have just been saying the prayer, “Lighten our darkness.” The new vicar being of an undecided temperament, and anxious to please everyone, had arranged morning prayer at twelve o’clock, that the school-children might attend without interference with their lessons—though whether it pleased the children to have their play-time taken is doubtful. Then the vicar’s mind was perplexed as to whether midday was matins or even-song, and the latter was finally fixed on.

It was just after even-song, then, at about

a quarter to one, that John Brown made his fourth journey through the furze to the Pleiades. John was quite a character in his way. He prided himself on being well educated—'twas even rumoured that he had once learnt Latin: but a few old school books carefully treasured up were the only present signs of John's education. John could bake, if he could do nothing else; and when he kept steady, he was as good a baker as could be found in the country round. He had been baker to Miss Tattleton's aunt, her predecessor in the business, when Miss Tattleton was only assistant in the shop, and gossips said that John had regarded his mistress's niece tenderly. But that was a long time ago. For many years John has now had an indulgent mistress in Miss Tattleton, though he never can be brought to regard her as his mistress. He considers himself as part of the establish-

ment; and when, through his great attachment to beer, Miss Tattleton is driven to give him notice, he argues with her that he was there before her, so why should he leave?

On occasions, when he has been unusually aggravating, Miss Tattleton has been known to shut him out, and declare he shall never enter her doors again; but she always relents, for she has a soft heart, though a spiteful tongue. John is proud of his gardening powers, and turns Miss Tattleton's garden to the best advantage. As he is working there he often sees Ralph passing in and out of Mr. Forncett's back gate, and a few remarks pass between them. In fact, John is one of the very few villagers to whom Ralph ever speaks. But John's remarks have not yet shown any tendency towards gossip. They are generally on gardening matters—as, for instance, “I've just

been a-settin' the early peas, and I'm blessed if the sparrers haven't begun at 'em already ;" or, "Them blessed little birds are a-eatin' up all the fruit blossom, and this here new Act of Parlyment won't let you shoot 'em."

But it occurred to Ralph, who was ready to do anything for his master, that the acquaintance with John might be improved to some advantage, so he followed him to the Pleiades.

"Hullo !" said Biggins, "here comes that silent fellow of Forncett's. Wonder what he wants here ? I suppose he's got tired of keeping all to hisself. They in general gets tired of that sort of thing, and comes round in the end. It's no good for the gentry to think they're going to keep their servants all to theirselves—'cos it ain't in human nature, I say."

Ralph and John entered, earnestly engaged in talking of the immense size of

what John called his brockylows. Ralph begged John to allow him to offer him some beer, and they soon left to go together to see John's wonderful "brockylows" in Miss Tattleton's garden.

"Nice view you have up here," said Ralph. "You look quite down on us and the neighbouring houses." Miss Tattleton's garden slanted up one side of the knoll.

"It's an author who lives over there, isn't it?" said Ralph.

"Yes, that's him at the gate, and a rum character he is, though he's mighty clever, I believe; and those two young ladies are daughters of the old lady who used to live at the next house."

"A Mr. Temple lives there now, doesn't he?" said Ralph.

"I think that's the name," said John.

"Is there a Mrs. Temple?"

"I think so, but if you want to know,

you ask *her*," turning his thumb towards the house, "she knows everything;" and he gave a knowing nod, to express his belief in Miss Tattleton's omniscience.

"Oh! it is not important," said Ralph, "but before I go I want to go into the shop to inquire about the postage of a foreign letter."

"Then you might as well come this way, and I can show you some young ducks that one of our old hens has hatched."

When John had done the honours of the garden and poultry-yard, he went to see if Miss Tattleton was disengaged, being rather anxious to introduce Ralph in a ceremonious way, as he considered him a superior man, and was proud of his acquaintance. But he came back looking mysterious, and thrusting his thumb over his shoulders and shutting up one eye, he said,

"She's got one of 'em in there a-gossiping, one of the regular ones."

At this moment Mrs. Lovelace took up her dainty parasol and tripped out of the shop, and John announced to Miss Tattleton that "this gentleman's been a-looking at our brockylow, and says it beats his out and out."

"Good morning," said Miss Tattleton, rather stiffly, for she was offended that Ralph had never been to see her before. "I am sure I wonder you'll condescend to look at my garden: I thought you were too proud to come near a poor old woman like me."

"You're certainly not old, and you don't look poor," said Ralph.

"Ah, that's your flattery; you want to make it up after treating me so badly, and ordering the servants not to come near my place. I know all about it—you can't keep things secret from me."

"So it seems," said Ralph.

“You ought to make it up by being a very good customer.”

“So I will,” said Ralph, looking all round to see what he could possibly buy, and seeing nothing that could be of any use to him.

“Well, if you want to do me any good,” said Miss Tattleton, in a serious and imploring tone, “don’t go and frighten everybody from coming to my shop. What have I done that I am to be shunned? I know it is all through the old woman who used to live over there,” pointing to Winterslow; “she began it, and she has left her sting behind her.”

“Perhaps you’ll find the new people behave better. That is the gentleman and his daughter, is it not?” said Ralph, pointing to Mr. Temple and Kate, who had just come out of the gate in the lane to meet Mr. Frowde, Diana, and Claudia.

“Yes,” said Miss Tattleton, “and I believe that old woman frightened them from coming to my shop.”

“I think you must be wrong,” said Ralph, “she looked such a kind old lady.”

“Yes; very kind, not to like her own flesh and blood,” she replied sharply,

“Is there a Mrs. Temple?” asked Ralph.

“Yes; but she never comes out: I suppose she’s an invalid.”

“Elderly lady, perhaps?”

“Oh, no! I’ve seen her from a distance in the garden, but I’ve heard she’s quite young, and looks more like Miss Temple’s sister.”

“Well,” said Ralph, looking round the shop, and putting half-a-sovereign down; “I promised to be a customer, so I’ll buy this gridiron,” and pointed to one that was hanging above his head: “I like to cook my own steaks.”

“You’re a lucky man if you have steaks to cook—they are not too plentiful in these parts. This is one-and-twopence ; what else can I sell you ?”

Ralph looked round, and was puzzled. He felt that, having asked questions, it was his duty to spend money ; but he could not think in a moment what would be least useless of all the things around him. So he said, incontinently, “Just make up the rest in saucepans—good morning,” and he walked quickly out.

“Well, he’s an odd character,” thought Miss Tattleton.

So thought also Mr. Forncett’s cook.

“What have Mr. Ralph been a-doing,” she said to the housemaid, “a-sending in these rubbishing tin saucepans, when we’ve plenty of good iron and copper ones.”

Meanwhile Mr. Temple and Manly Frowde and the ladies were chatting in the lane.

"How do you like the house?" said Diana to Kate.

"Oh! I like it very well," said Kate; "and the garden and fields are delightful."

"I used to think it such a dreary house," said Claudia; "I fancied there was always an echo when we spoke, as if the house were empty and haunted. Oh, I hated it!"

"Oh!" said Kate suddenly, "are you the mysterious daughters?"

Diana and Claudia looked surprised.

"Kate, my dear," said her father, "how rude you are! I hope you will excuse my daughter," he said, turning to Diana, "but she never thinks before she speaks."

"Really," said Diana, "I like anything mysterious, and shall be quite glad to know what Miss Temple means."

The interview with Mrs. Selfe was explained as gently as possible by Mr. Temple, who was afraid of hurting the feelings of

the ladies by any allusion to an unpleasantness between them and their mother, for he had heard how matters stood from Manly Frowde.

“I think,” said Mr. Frowde to Kate, “you had better come in as often as you can during the next few days, and make the acquaintance of these mysterious ladies.”

Kate looked quite willing to do so.

“If you encourage her too much, Mr. Frowde,” said Temple, “you’ll soon find her troublesome, and want to get rid of her.”

“I’ll tell her when I do,” he said.

So Kate Temple was soon on good terms with the Frowdes and Diana and Claudia. She learnt to find her way in at Mr. Frowde’s little wicket-gate, to which, being only three or four yards from the gate of Winterslow, she could run across without putting on her hat. Mr. Frowde’s dogs used

to rush to meet her when she lifted the latch, and went barking after her up the garden path to the cottage. No doubt in their own language they remarked to one another, as their master and mistress did, that their new acquaintance was a very pleasant one—for dogs have decided opinions on human beings.

CHAPTER II.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE PAST.

RAFAEL : He met *himself*, you say ?

ASTROLOGOS : He met himself, my lord,
 Creeping to bed along the half-lit corridor,
 He met his boy-self, daring, dauntless, devilish,
 Poising a rapier with a man's heart's blood on it.
 He died that night.

The Comedy of Dreams.

IT might be a pleasant thing, perchance, to meet one's past and half-forgotten self. The aged poet or philosopher might like to see his gay boy-self before him, wild as the winds and happy as the birds. The ancient lady, calm in the thought of a well-ordered life, and ready for the lovelier life to come,

might rejoice to look at her own pretty girl-self, when she had her naughtinesses, and was possibly a precocious flirt. I suppose we all dream of being young again. It is an intuitive prophecy of that renewal of youth, whether for good or evil, which is the inevitable destiny of every immortal soul.

But to meet a past self amid past scenes of sadness or terror, of lost love or broken honour, is true torture. The most severe punishment that can befall a human soul is the consciousness of having done a wrong that has no remedy. "I have done an evil thing, and I cannot atone." To feel this, is anguish beyond all that Dante dreamt of hell. Yet there is compensation : since that remorse, that ayenbite (to use good English), can only be felt by the spirit which has kinship to the Divinity. From finite evil God works infinite good. But

in these days the tempting devil is degenerate: lordly Satan, the rebel archangel, scarred with thunder, has given way to polite Belial, who sets the fashion; to obese Mammon, who deals in Turks and Egyptians; to Mephistopheles, who keeps the divorce court going; to Asmodeus, who makes even good folks eager for uncharitable gossip.

Frank Forncett was only too sure that he was now face to face with the past. He fancied he had forgotten. Can any true man forget his first and only true love? The old days came back to Forncett—the pleasant time with Leonora, a creature of royal beauty, of angelic purity, of passionate power. Vividly returned to him the happy scenes in calm old-fashioned gardens, where yew-walks were plentiful, where fountains plashed, and peacocks screamed, and every sun-dial had a different Latin motto. If

only he had said the right word at the right instant ! But he had not : he had been too slow, too timid, too doubtful of winning so great a prize ; and there came to the front one who never doubted, one who had no scruples and no fears, one who achieved in a moment what he, Frank Forncett, had been trying to achieve for I know not how long. And then, what followed ? This interloper, careless of what he so easily had won, threw Leonora contemptuously aside, and carried his madness elsewhere. He committed a double crime.

“ I suppose I had better go away,” said Forncett to himself. “ Why, now, have I been brought where I can see Leonora ? I wish I could see her husband : I think I could administer a sufficient horse-whipping. Well, ’tis strange we should both come to this out-of-the-way village, but I suppose

Providence meant something to happen. I'll go and smoke."

I fancy that in the curling white wreaths he sometimes detected the graceful form of Leonora—as he remembered her in her joyous girlhood.

And Leonora?

Yes, she had recognized Frank Forncett—a man not easily forgotten by a lady, even if she did not chance to fall in love with him. And to her his presence—even though it was certain they need never meet—was a terror and a pain. It brought back again her happy girlhood. They had been boy and girl together, and the vision had come back to her, as it also came back to him. He had gone round the world, and been hardened by innumerable adventures, yet every nerve trembled to the tender reminiscence of a divine romance that ended in disappointment. She, after patient suf-

fering, had ripened into tranquil womanhood: yet, when she saw Frank Forncett, no longer a boy, every nerve within her also trembled, and she felt as if she were again the girl who longed to be told that she was loved. The old time came back again, and all that had intervened seemed trivial.

She remembered one scene. It was at the gate of an ancient, quaint flower-garden, the air heavy with summer fragrance. He was about to mount his horse and ride away. There was a strange soft light, the prelude of a perfect sunset, in the western sky. A white peacock spread his fans upon the garden wall, looking like a bird cut in Parian marble. A fountain plashed close by. She remembered the caw of the rooks, the coo of the doves—she remembered, above all, the loving look in her young sweetheart's eyes. "Oh! why, why, why

does he not ask me?" was the stifled cry of her heart: and he, not knowing that the magic moment had come, rode away with the question unasked . . . and never had the chance to ask it. For the next morning brought a suitor who did not hesitate—a suitor handsome and wealthy and bold, who pleased her father well, and who half pleased, half terrified, wholly mesmerized, Leonora. He won her easily. He cast her away as easily. But the story must not yet be told.

Leonora, having definitely ascertained that Forncett was so near to her, went to Mr. Temple at once.

"What is to be done?" she said. "Must we leave this place? What terrible destiny brings us together in this way?"

"Don't exaggerate your annoyances," he replied. "I never knew whether you cared much about Forncett, for you must remem-

ber I was away at Constantinople during most of the time he visited at the dear old place. You wrote me some pretty romance about him. I believe I have the letters yet, for I always kept your letters—they were so full of life. When I came back, Forncett was not spoken of, and you were engaged to be married to——”

“Oh ! please say no more, William ! The thought is horrible. What a fool I was ! What a mere girlish bashful fool ! Suppose I had told Frank I wanted him to marry me ! How delighted he would have been !”

“Yes, Leonora, that is true enough,” replied Temple, with the grave smile of the diplomatist. “Yes, but why could you not tell him with glance of eye or pressure of hand ? It is all over—a *coup manqué* ; but I do not see that his proximity need trouble you. You will not meet him. Even if you

should, I see no harm. He has probably quite forgotten you."

"I am sure he has not," she said, with emphasis.

"That means, you have not forgotten him. Why should you? He is a pleasant poetic memory of your happy girl-time, before the inevitable troubles of the world assailed you. You made a hero of him. I doubt not he is a dull prosaic sort of fellow, without an idea—or else a gay Lothario, who has had fifty thousand flirtations since he kissed you in his boyhood."

"William, you are cruel. He never kissed me; and he is neither dull nor wicked; and you have no right to laugh at me in this way. You are almost always kind."

"I am kind now, Leonora, for I am trying to make you understand the truth.

You are not a girl, and he is not a boy.
Love fancies are not immortal."

Leonora thought they were ; but when Mr. Temple grew didactic she was always silent.

"I will call on Frank Forncett," he said.

CHAPTER III.

FROM OXFORD TO COPSE HILL.

Old Ramus' ghost is busy at my brain,
 And my skull teems with notions infinite.

CHARLES LAMB.

THIS is a world of strange meetings. The man you seem least likely to meet is always the man you do meet. Tixover was a believer, from experience, in this curious contrariety of affairs. He looked at life as a pleasant arrangement of surprises. Nothing is certain but the unforeseen, say the French ; and this Tix thought fortunate, since what you do not expect is invariably pleasanter

than what you do. For example, he enjoyed much more thoroughly his evening with the two young ladies at that wayside inn than he would have enjoyed it if he had been sitting, as he intended, at the feet of the Gamaliel of Greek. He liked to hear Plato eloquently expounded by his greatest modern disciple ; but he preferred the easy original chatter of a couple of lively girls—a talk that, if shallow as a rivulet, had the rivulet's sparkle and life. He did not regret his accidental delay, even though, when he reached Oxford next day, he found that Gamaliel had been called away upon important business, and that he was left to his own devices.

No man need for a moment be dull in the great university city, and least of all an Oxford man. Tixover might have spent a month there without a moment's dulness had he chosen ; but he had other ideas in

his head. So, after strolling with a few friends in Christchurch meadow, and chatting with one or two more at the Union, he made his way to the Mitre for a dinner and bed. There are a good many new hotels in these times, but most Oxford men believe in the Mitre.

Tixover had declined several invitations to dinner, because he did not particularly care for the men who invited him. All good fellows, you know—all sure to turn out very fine fellows in due time; but so uncomfortably *young*. Youth is a great thing for its possessor; but its delighted bumptiousness is not always attractive. A young colt gaily kicking up his heels is a charming object—at a distance. And university youth is perhaps more trying to one's philosophy than other and even inferior youth; for in Oxford and Cambridge there grows among these boys an opinion that outside this

microcosm there is nothing worth consideration; and your cosmopolitan does not much care to be troubled with a young fellow who is utterly ignorant of the world without—whose ideas are those of a preparatory school. Heaven forbid that I should say a word against the two great universities—more especially against Oxford, “the great mother of Churchmen and Tories”—but there is no harm in the remark that university men, *in statu pupillari*, are apt, however precocious they may be, rather to bore men of the world.

So Lord Tixover escaped from several young friends who gladly would have entertained him in noble fashion, and contrived to slip away to the Mitre, where he got his cutlet and claret in a corner of the coffee-room. As he sat, after dinner, tacitly thanking Venables for the excellence of his Lafitte, he noticed at the next table a man

who, having dined in a leisurely way, appeared to be doing much the same thing. Anybody at all unusual invariably attracted Tix, and this indolent diner at the Mitre was just the sort of fellow that aroused his inquiring mind.

“By Jove,” he thought, holding his goblet to the light, to catch the golden sparks that scintillate through the lambent violet of a fine claret, “that man’s an original. His head hath brains. His spectacles give him rather a profound look. What is he, I wonder? Not a professor, or he’d hardly be dining here. I must make his acquaintance. How shall I do it? Tread on his toe by accident? or pretend to mistake him for Dr. Pusey?”

While Tixover was pondering hereon, the man with the spectacles rose and left the room. Tix followed him.

“I must introduce myself to that man,”

he said to himself; "I like the look of him. He mayn't be anything remarkable, but he's not common-place."

The wearer of the spectacles was standing at the inn door, looking out upon brilliant moonlight, which made the glorious High Street of Oxford magical. To him said Tixover :

"The old city is fine by this light. It is a city of moonlight. Youngsters don't know what sunlight means till they get from the university into the world."

"Some of us," the other said, "have to face the world without help from the university. And I have heard it said that a university education would have spoilt Shakespeare."

"Whose paradox was that?"

"One Manly Frowde's. I don't suppose you know anything of him. He's a cousin of mine, with a craze for writing novels and poetry."

“If you’re a cousin of Frowde’s,” said Tixover, “shake hands at once. He is an old friend of mine. I’m going to look in upon him to-morrow for an hour or two.”

“I have promised to be there to-morrow,” said Branscombe, “and to spend Easter with him. Will you go by the coach? It starts from the Clarendon, and will put us down at his gate.”

“Capital,” said Tixover, and thus it was settled; and the two new acquaintances ended the evening with a game of billiards, in which the Viscount (who played all games to perfection) had too easy a victory over “the man with the spectacles.”

What is there more enjoyable than a fast drive behind four horses through a pleasant country in fine weather? Mr. Stanley Gay, who took the coach on the latter part of the journey, was a coachman of the right sort: his horses gave him so little trouble that he

had ample time to talk to his passengers. Half-an-hour for luncheon at a most comfortable hotel in the town, famed for Archbishop Laud and biscuits, gave the travellers an opportunity of trying some dry Heidsieck, admirably iced.

They were a merry coach load, most of the party being Oxford men, to whom fun is rather more natural than study. There were also one or two ladies going to town: probably they will stay in London next day for some shopping, and get home by rail; for Mr. Gay leaves the White Horse Cellar at ten in the morning, and what lady could possibly be in Piccadilly at that frightfully early hour? Hence Mr. Gay, a student of human nature and statistics (one of which is often mistaken for the other) remarked that it was much easier to take about ninety per cent. of the female world to London than to bring fifty per cent. back.

Harry Branscombe and Lord Tixover became great friends on the top of the coach. They had a common measure. What was it? You will hardly guess. *Romance*. That Tix has a strong vein of romance in him everyone knows who has noticed his adventurous career; but who would expect anything of the kind from the staid Harry, who does business of much magnitude with infinite gravity—eyeing the world behind his spectacles like Minerva's oldest and most sapient owl? Yet he has it in him: and the Viscount found it out; and by the time Stanley Gay pulled up at Frowde's green gate, they were on the most intimate terms.

At that gate they were welcomed by a joyous group. Beside the master and mistress, Diana and Claudia were there in the gayest costume, suitable for vernal shooling; and stalwart Jack Sebright and piquant Kate

Temple made up the party. Kate was ravishing. Her cheeks had a softer bloom than ever—her lips a sweeter dew. She was a perfect little picture. Tix, who has the keenest eye in the world, said to himself, as he caught her gay shy glance,

“That girl’s in love, or she could not be so confoundedly pretty.”

“You can sleep anywhere, I know, Tix,” said Frowde, when introductions were over, and the travellers were refreshing themselves beneath the trees. “Our cottage is small, but we can squeeze a good many people into it, thanks to the irregular rooms it contains.”

“I can sleep on a mantelpiece, or a kitchen table,” said the Viscount. “Mr. Disraeli has somewhere remarked that we mistake comfort for civilization. It is one of the most pregnant of his aphorisms. I hate comfort.”

“Let us try to make him uncomfortable,” said Diana. “An apple-pie bed might satisfy him, if properly made. The right way is to take away one of the sheets altogether.”

“I defy you, ladies,” said Tix, “I am never so happy as when I am conquering difficulties. If you can make me uncomfortable with such delightful company, and such poetic surroundings, you will also make me ashamed of myself. But I defy you.”

The literary business whereon Tixover wanted to speak to Frowde was soon settled, and the afternoon and evening were right pleasant. At dinner the Viscount, who never missed an opportunity of studying character, contrived to draw Jack Sebright into conversation, and to elicit from him the burden of his life—a sacerdotal future.

Tixover laughed right merrily.

“I have often thought I should like to

turn parson by-and-by. I honour your scruples, Mr. Sebright, and wish there were a few other men as scrupulous. We are in a strange state just now : the clergy are attempting to destroy the Church of England, and the laity are determined to maintain it. The clergy are becoming a caste and forgetting their humanity. Rare old Bishop Latimer once said to his hearers, ‘There were never before so many gentlemen and so little gentleness.’ If he lived now, he would say there never was such a noisy set of clergymen with so little Christian love.”

“You are hard on the parsons, Tix,” said Frowde. “With the exception of a few strong-brained men who will never be bishops, the clergy rather distrust me ; but I am a strong supporter of the priestly order, and I desire to see the Church of England so firmly established that none dare dream of

attacking her. At the same time, you know I am what is inaccurately called an Erastian."

"Upon honour," interrupted Jack Sebright, "if you're going to be as learned as this, I shall give up the Church altogether. I haven't brain for it. I appeal to the ladies."

"We are all with you," said Mrs. Frowde. "Parson Adams's wife said it was wicked to quote Scripture out of church: I say it is intolerable to talk theology at dinner."

"I am rebuked," said Tixover. "But may I just remark that it is highly probable I shall end my career as a clergyman? When a man has seen the world—say, at seventy—I think he may venture to mount a pulpit and teach the people. Not an hour before, in my judgment. I think I shall prefer to wait till I am eighty."

"Let us hope we shall all be there to hear your first sermon," said Mrs. Frowde.

“I suppose you have a living in the family.”

“Faith, yes; one of the best in England. Three thousand a-year, and only two hundred souls in the parish. My great-uncle, who is nearly ninety, has grown mellow in that rectory for half a century or more. He gives his curate five hundred a-year, which I take to be unique; but he says he doesn’t see how a gentleman can live on less.”

Dinner over, they adjourned to Frowde’s book-room. There was no withdrawing-room in that cottage, nor did the ladies withdraw from the dinner-table before the men. The book-room, with bay-windows, looking over the moonlit lawn, with pleasant pictures and photographs on the walls, with books in every available corner, was cosy and pleasant.

“This is your workshop, Frowde,” said the Viscount.

“Mine and my wife’s. We wedge our writing-tables into two different windows, not to elbow each other too closely. I always think the great necessity of existence is elbow-room.”

“Can you get that in the Church?” said Jack Sebright, in a forlorn tone, that made every one laugh.

“It much depends on the strength of your elbows,” said Tix.

“Will nobody sing?” said Frowde. “We want song to make this evening perfect. Come, Miss Temple, you will charm us with music, I know.”

With face rose-flushed, and a soft light in her eyes, Kate Temple sang:—

Only a touch, and nothing more :

Ah ! but never so touched before !

Touch of lip, was it ? Touch of hand ?

Either is easy to understand.

Earth may be smitten with fire or frost—

Never the touch of true love lost.

Only a word, was it? Scarce a word !
Musical whisper, softly heard,
Syllabled nothing—just a breath—
'Twill outlast life, and 'twill laugh at death.
Love with so little can do so much—
Only a word, sweet ! Only a touch !

The feelings of Jack Sebright, as Kate sang that songlet, may be left to the imagination of any reader who is in love—and we devoutly hope we have not a reader who is not in love. Nobody thanked Kate for her song, since it just suited the moment : they might as well have thanked the moon for being at the full. And a little later the party broke up, and Kate was escorted to her gate—almost twenty yards—by the whole force of the company. And it is credibly thought Jack Sebright squeezed her little roseleaf of a hand.

“I shall go and dip in the Thames to-morrow at six,” said the Viscount. “Who’ll join me?”

“I,” said Harry Branscombe.

“I also,” said Jack Sebright.

“No theology on the road,” said Tix;
“leave matins to the lark. Will eleven be
too early for breakfast, Mrs. Frowde?”

“It is our unchangeable hour,” she replied.

CHAPTER IV.

A CRUCIAL INTERVIEW.

A word is oft as potent as a thunderbolt.

MR. TEMPLE was glad that his daughter should have the society of her neighbours, although himself disinclined to make new intimacies. Kate, therefore, running in at pleasure to chat with Mrs. Frowde, and to borrow any books that took her erratic fancy, had several times encountered Jack Sebright, and had not failed to perceive that he was uncommonly glad to find her at the cottage when he happened to call. There was a fine frankness in Jack's

character which made it impossible for him to hide any feeling which he entertained, and Kate had enough feminine quickness to discover very soon how much he admired her, and enjoyed her society. Can a woman ever precisely tell the actual moment when her feeling towards a man passes from mere liking into actual love? It was, and probably is now, the code of wise mothers and aunts that "it does not become a young woman" to give away her heart until she is asked for it. And perhaps, in the pure heart of a maiden, love never does become a living thing until she is asked to love—only that same asking does not always require words, but may be done with the pressure of a hand or the glance of an eye. Certes, at this happy Eastertide Jack Sebright had uttered to Kate Temple no word of love: whether he had asked and been answered in some subtle way we leave the

reader to judge. At any rate, they were very happy when together, and not very miserable when apart.

Jack's chief source of trouble was that tender conscience of his. Why should a tender conscience dwell within such a young Hercules? It did, unluckily for Jack's peace of mind. As he rode along, thinking of the future, now illumined by a dream of delight, he would check his visionary fancies suddenly. It perpetually troubled him that his desire to win Kate Temple seemed to act upon him as an incentive to please his father and take orders. The Rev. Marston Sebright had many intimate friends in the ecclesiastical hierarchy: once a priest, Jack's upward course would be easy. He often pictured himself in a comfortable rectory, with delightful gardens and conservatories in which Kate might disport herself, growing all the flowers she loved. Yet the vision did not quite satisfy.

“ Hang it, Bessie !” he would ejaculate to his mare, “ it doesn’t seem right for a parson to be in love. It’s beneath him, or above him—I don’t know which. Fancy the Reverend Romeo ! It won’t do, lass, now will it ? And then Kate ? She a parson’s wife ! All the parsons’ wives I know are grave and demure : Kate’s all laughter and song. If I could only be a soldier—or an author, like Frowde, but that wants brains—or anything with some life in it.”

And then he would take Bessie over a few fences just to get rid of his irritation. But he could not get rid of the inevitable dilemma. To marry Kate he must become a parson : and he doubted his fitness to be a parson, or hers to be a parson’s wife ; and he doubted whether love in a parsonage was at all the radiant electric delicious thing which love is in places less decorous. Kate Temple of course was a little teased about

Jack's state of mind by those keen observers, Diana and Claudia.

"Really, Kate," said Diana, "it's too bad of you to have taken Jack Sebright away from me. I have made up my mind to have him, and I intended to make him become a bishop, for it would be such fun to be a bishopess."

"I can't imagine him in an apron," said Claudia; "and if I may mention his legs, I think they are almost too well-developed for black cloth gaiters."

"If there were a few bishops of Jack's build, they would not disestablish the Church in a hurry," said Diana.

"Would you really like to marry Mr. Sebright?" said Kate, looking a little serious.

"If he were ten years older perhaps I might," said Diana.

Ten years was a long period in Kate's

mind, and Jack seemed to her already perfect; therefore she wondered why Diana could wish him to be older.

Diana and Claudia left Copse Hill a few days after Easter, but Kate continued her visits, and became a great favourite with Mr. and Mrs. Frowde. It would have been strange if she had not. She was as gay a girl as God ever created—sweet as a flower, blithe as a bird, pure as a breeze from the south born between sky and sea. To Frowde, a poet, she was a divine picture: to his wife, a philosopher, she was a delightful study. Kate Temple had many charms, but her absolute unconsciousness of those charms was, in verity, the chief charm of all.

Kate was a musical child, and could make melody. When Frowde discovered this, he wrote lines to which she made fair music of her own, and sang them blithely on the lawn. Here is one such:—

“ On this green path, through this deep glade,
Lovers may linger, unafraid
Of the unloving world, whose way
Is to betray.

“ Through fluttering leaves the dim lights gleam,
Leading, misleading, like a dream :
Each turn o’ the path has marvels new—
That’s Love’s way too.

“ Lo, now a cavern, dark and cool,
Green moss beside a shadowy pool,
Such silence as the hush’d air keeps
When Venus sleeps.

“ O loitering lover, be thou wise—
Kiss softly lips, kiss gently eyes,
Lest the delicious spell thou break,
And Venus wake.”

“Venus Asleep,” was Frowde’s title for this classic trifle ; but in the heart of the pretty musician who found melody for it the invincible goddess was beginning to awake.

Mr. Temple fulfilled his promise to Leonora, and called on Frank Forncett. Years had passed since they met, and their

meeting then had been a very brief one. Forncett had only just made the acquaintance of Temple's family, when William Temple, an ambitious young diplomatist, was sent out as attaché to the Embassy at the Sublime Porte. I do not object to that magniloquent phrase. "Porte" means a *gate*, and Byzantium is the gate of Asia : and "sublime," etymologists aver, is simply *supra limum*—"above the mud." If the Turks have at diverse times kept their turbanned heads a trifle above the mud, it is very much to the credit of those followers of the False Prophet. There seems little chance of their doing it much longer.

"It is a strange coincidence," said Frank Forncett to Temple, as they walked gravely up and down the lawn, whose velvet turf and radiant flower-pots did great credit to Ralph's supervision. "I have not forgotten: my life has been a deep regret; I have seen

many lands and read many books and made many friends, but one face has always haunted me. It has been a life-long sorrow to me, Temple, but also a life-long delight. But for remembering that lovely face in those dear old gardens at Temple Cloud, there are times when I should have gone mad. It is hard to conceive the trouble of a lonely man who, by his own default, has lost the one woman who could have given him unimaginable happiness. And yet it would have been a greater misery to me never to have met her—never to have lost her.”

“You retain your romance,” said Temple calmly. “Mine is gone.”

“Never be too sure of that,” replied Forncett. “Do you know that there are springs of pure water in the heart of the earth with such strength that they break through the primeval granite? You may

be made of adamant, Temple, but let love touch you and you will find a sudden fissure. If you wish not to renew your romance, keep out of the way of womankind. As for me, I may surely gaze at a distance at the lady whom I loved in my hot youth, without raising a blush on the purest cheek that ever was kissed by the soft air of spring."

"There is no reasoning with a poet," said Mr. Temple; "but I fully agree with all you say, and will convey its substance, in more diplomatic language, to the person interested. You are as chivalrous as Quixote himself, my dear Forncett, and I heartily honour you for the noble way in which you consider this delicate question. Let us henceforth be friends."

"Always," said Frank Forncett, and with the hearty hand-grasp of Englishmen they parted.

Mr. Temple reported the whole conversa-

tion (more than we have reported here) to Leonora. To him she said no word: to herself, when alone, she said,

“Yes, he loves me still.”

CHAPTER V.

A MAIDEN'S PRAYER.

Cras amet qui nunq' amavit.

KATE TEMPLE began to think that she did not know what was the matter with her. She was much happier than ever she had been before, and she could not at all understand why she was happier. And, although happier, she was not quite so gay. She looked upon her older self—only a week or two older, be it known—as rather frivolous. She began to look at life with precocious wisdom, and had the most sagacious colloquies with her pony and her

dogs. From none of those intelligent quadrupeds did she get much help.

Now what had set our little Kate quivering like a silver-rinded birch-tree in the west wind of summer, when every leaf is whirled by the petulant breeze? Why did the sky seem brighter, the grass greener, the note of the nightingale (and Copse Hill is populous with nightingales) more delicious than of old? Kate could only guess. When she connected this strange new feeling of hers with Jack Sebright, the innocent child felt that she blushed all over, though Mr. Charles Darwin assures us, on scientific grounds, that this is an impossibility. Kate felt herself all one blush for being so naughty as to think half-lovingly of Jack, who had never said to her a word which the properest young man might not utter to the demurest young woman. For indeed Jack Sebright, though he would have faced anything male,

from a mad bull to a fighting Irishman, was mortally afraid of this little Kate Temple, and had always treated her almost too respectfully. The boy was slow—in erotics, as well as in mathematics and classics. And Kate being a thoroughly simple child, who had never seen any of the silly novels which teach our female youth what they ought never to know, it was clearly a matter of magnetism. It was the old story over again, and as original as when the comedy of love was enacted in Eden. Jack and Kate knew no guile. We will not say, with Lord Palmerston, that they possibly were “born good,” for fear of Supralapsarian and Sublapsarian critics; but they certainly had not a naughty idea in their childish heads, and would have found *Adam Bede* or *Cometh up as a Flower* as unintelligible as the Fifth Book of Euclid.

Kate, one radiant morning, tripped to the

top of Copse Hill with her dogs, and sat on the wooden seat beneath the larger group of trees. That seat is comparatively new, but it is scarred by many clasp-knives, inscribing initials; and among them, more artistic than the rest, are those of two young sailors, with the inevitable anchor cut beneath. Visitors these of Mr. Frowde's, who

. . . loves to talk with mariners
That come from a far countree.

They bring their mates; they bring quaint talk of remote places to which the poet will never wander; they bring opossums and kangaroos, lovebirds exquisite and parrots wisely loquacious; flying squirrels and tree-frogs, coral from Polynesia, and paper dinner-napkins from Japan. They bring, better than all, a visionary fantasy of isles inexorable, of rivers strangely vast, of the ruined temples of dead nations whose history shall never be known.

Well, here is Kate Temple, sitting on the well-carved seat, swinging her fair-ankled feet—for the said seat is uncomfortably high—and fixing her pretty eyes on the ridge of hills known as the Hog's Back. She is in an Irish frame of mind: she is quite happy, but she might be happier. It is a pleasant scene upon which she looks. "Dim-discovered spires" and towers sleep amidst a sea of foliage; and just below to the left lies Copse Hill Vicarage, an abode of perfect peace, as are all vicarages and rectories. Yes, she is very happy indeed—but . . .

But she suddenly sees something which makes her even happier. It is a young gentleman who comes up the lane by the vicarage: he is walking, but his horse follows him. A stalwart lad, a bonny mare. Kate knows all about it at once, and wishes to goodness she could slip away and run down

the hill before Jack Sebright can reach its summit;—that is, she thinks she wishes it. But, in such cases, it is rather hard to analyse.

Any way, she keeps her ground womanfully, while Jack, followed by Bessie, marches up the hill, unperceiving his lady-love. He walks bravely and well, as if he were leading a forlorn hope—until, quite suddenly, he becomes aware of a pretty little figure in a white straw hat, with feet that do not reach the ground, seated beneath the trees amid her dogs. Jack blushes, but marches on—Bessie leisurely following, and now and then stopping to nibble the grass. Bessie had plenty of exercise at this period, and made the best of her lazy intervals.

Why does Kate's heart flutter more than ever before at Jack's arrival? She is conscious that she cannot look at all a dignified little person on that high seat, with her feet

in the air: yet she will not get down, for she is afraid to take the first step in anything. She feels somehow that the supreme moment is at hand.

Jack does not. Jack comes up in his usual way—rather awkward and shy, but full of suppressed delight; and then, quite suddenly, as he takes Kate's pretty little hand, he sees a light in her eye which dazzles the depths of his brain, and he opens his own great eyes wide with a vast surprise, and he says . . .

Well, what he says shall not be narrated here. Neither Jack nor Kate has ever been able to remember. One thing is certain: they sat on that seat beneath the trees, quite unconscious that they could be seen from the vicarage on one side and the Pleiades on the other—quite careless of both parson and publican, quite forgetful of the dogs who wandered home to Winter-

slow, and of Bessie, who found her way into Manly Frowde's stable, and had a capital feed of oats long before they awoke to the passage of time.

Jack Sebright had not intended to say a word to Kate; but, oh! what are you to do when the loving light in your sweetheart's eyes asks you to speak? Who can refuse? Now, Jack felt he had an enormous business to undertake. There was the grave and dignified Mr. Temple to attack; there was the Rev. Marston Sebright, who would regard marriage as absurd until he was at least a rector—better wait to be a dean; there was his dear mother, who would be jealous of any girl he loved. Yet in his heart he thought of his mother as his best ally. *If she once saw Kate!*

As to Kate, after her happiness, which had a strange element of fear in it, she was glad to run away to bed early. Jack had

spent his afternoon at Mr. Frowde's; she had seen a good deal of him under the limes; everything was pleasant. The look he gave her as he brought Bessie to the gate expressed delight and agony in about equal amount. She, quite satisfied with Jack Sebright, was much troubled about herself. Heretofore she had done nothing without reference to her father, whom she loved as few daughters love, seeing that she was the daughter, not of his body only, but also of his soul. Now she had given an irrevocable pledge without a word to him. It terrified her.

And one other thing terrified her. It came upon her suddenly, as she tried to think out the whole combination. *Her mother!* There was a mystery here which the pure child could not understand. There was a sorrow which made her father renounce the society of which he was a

natural leader, and live in quietude. Was it something which would make it impossible for her dear Jack—honest noble loving boy—ever to marry her. The child's brain grew confused. She did the wisest thing troubled mortal can do. She knelt by her bedside and prayed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW VICAR.

PRINCE RAFAEL :

Ha! the new Legate. Has he power and pertinence?
 Does he seem worthy Hermes of the Vatican?
 Has he the wisdom which befits a cardinal?

ASTROLOGOS :

He seems most prudent. I must cast his horoscope.
 Born with the sun in Cancer or in Scorpio,
 If I mistake not.

The Comedy of Dreams.

THE new vicar was a man of good intentions. We all know what place is paved with good intentions. It is to be feared that the Rev. Vypar Voyd was a very good paviour.

It was with the best intentions that, soon after his arrival in Copse Hill, he made a round of visits amongst his parishioners, and tried to elicit from each person his private opinion of his neighbours. He may have supposed that by investigating character in this way he would be better enabled to spiritually guide his flock; and probably he had no doubt in his mind as to whether this was the best way of obtaining a correct estimate of people. At any rate, if he judged by what he heard, he must have supposed he had rather a bad lot to deal with—that is, if his own account be taken into consideration; for no sooner had he heard all that was to be said than he commenced retailing his opinion, formed on such gossip, to everyone. If he visited Squire Ashley, he had something to say against General Conway's family; and when he went to General Conway's he had something

to say against Squire Ashley. In the same way he denounced Miss Tattleton to Mr. Frowde as a dangerous woman; and to Mr. Allworthy, the plumber and glazier, he spoke of Mr. Frowde as a very bad man. But this was done with the best intentions, though it was likely to lead to awkward consequences.

But, perhaps the opinion formed by the new vicar of his parishioners might not have been so bad had there not been imparted into the gossip of the place what may be called the Urgent element. Hitherto the gossip at Copse Hill had been comparatively harmless. A good deal of discount had always been allowed on tales heard at the village shop and inn; but when a parson carries a tale there is a certain amount of importance attached to it. A parson may go into the drawing-rooms of the very richest, and into the hovels of the poorest:

he has great power with both classes, for either good or evil. Whether he carry good or evil with him, depends on himself.

Now the Rev. Vypar Voyd had married one of the eight daughters of the Rev. Uriah Urgent, vicar of Battlefield, a village two miles from Copse Hill ; and the seven unmarried daughters, not having many resources in themselves, were rather given to discussing their neighbours' affairs—with perhaps no evil intentions, but for mere excitement.

While Mr. Voyd was making the acquaintance of his parishioners, a batch of three or four of the Miss Urgents were in the habit of coming over to see their sister, to talk with her in a sisterly way on things in general. Hence it happened that they added their store of gossip to what Mr. Voyd was busily collecting. They were girls with a good

deal of animal spirits, who seemed always overflowing with the subject on hand, and they would all talk at once in an excited manner on some trifling subject, which seemed hardly worth so much energy.

On the afternoon of the day when Jack Sebright had been made so happy by his interview with Kate on the hill, four of these gushing girls walked over to Copse Hill Vicarage. Their sister told them what she had seen in the morning, and this led to gossip about the Temples. Very soon all tongues were going at once, and Mr. and Mrs. Voyd found it difficult to know which to answer first. A stranger going into the room would have made very little from the fragments of sentences that could be heard :

CONSTANCE : . . . “so very odd.”

MARIAN : . . . “must have done something.”

JENNY: . . . "can't be her mother."

BELLA: . . . "not to come to church."

MRS. VOYD: . . . "most mysterious people."

JENNY: . . . "so friendly with those Frowdes."

MARIAN: . . . "ashamed to show herself."

MR. VOYD (solemnly): "Something not right."

MRS. VOYD: "Vypar says he has heard something of a Temple divorce case, and thinks——"

MR. VOYD (putting up his finger): "Hu—sh!"

At this point of the conversation Mr. Voyd had, no doubt, the good intention of stopping scandal, but his mysterious "Hush" brought a dead silence, and gave a much

greater importance to the story, the end of which the girls were all burning to know; but they discreetly waited till their brother-in-law left the room.

The new vicar either imagined from the gossip he heard that there was great room for improvement, or else fancied that Mr. Bonfellow had not done his duty in the parish, for he soon set to work in earnest to reform the village. Now your earnest and sincere reformer is a great fact; yet somehow he often does a good deal of harm before he succeeds in doing any good. The new vicar was quite earnest and sincere. To him it seemed that his predecessor, Mr. Bonfellow, had done his duty in a loose and lazy fashion. Copse Hill required to be evangelized: there were heretics about who ought to be brought to church or excommunicated. There were female folk whom the vicar thought he might improve by in-

terviews in his study, which was his vague approach to the confessional. In all this he was absolutely doing his best ; but parishes, like individuals, have their own old-fangled habits, and Copse Hill had not been accustomed to this style of treatment. Everybody admired the new vicar, but, somehow, nobody liked him. The gentry saw clearly that he was a minor light of the Church, and that some day he might do in a diocese what now he was attempting to do in a parish : so they gave him cordial support, and were liberal in their contributions for any charitable purpose. The commonalty were not at first so ready to follow his lead. They had liked Mr. Bonfellow, who regarded every parishioner with a brotherly feeling, and who was neither dogmatist nor disciplinarian ; so Mr. Voyd, who was both, came as rather an unsatisfactory contrast. If the country clergy could only realise how much

more important is friendly communion with their people, rich and poor, old and young, than any mere matter of rubric or ritual, the Church of England would have a new lease of life.

The Vicarage at Copse Hill lies pleasantly beneath the slope of the hill common. There from time immemorial cricket had been played on Sunday afternoons; and before Copse Hill church was built, when the people of the hamlet went to a lovely thirteenth-century church a mile and a half away, the rector thereof had been in the habit of coming to look at the cricket match if the Copse Hill folk came to morning service. Mr. Bonfellow had tolerated this Sunday afternoon cricket; so had his predecessors, who rose to high positions in the Church; but Mr. Voyd could not endure anything so dreadful, and induced the cricketers to give up their play by starting

a cricket club which had its meetings on Wednesdays, and which won eternal fame because the players insisted on wearing their pads on the wrong leg. His intentions throughout were excellent, but the best intentions often fail. The cleverest cricketers of Copse Hill were men who could not afford to throw away their Wednesday afternoons: hence, when there was a match with any neighbouring parish club, Copse Hill was always ignominiously defeated. The boys who on Sunday afternoons had fagged out, and been useful, now passed the time in loafing about, drinking vile beer, running after the girls, and otherwise wasting their time. Well-intentioned was the new vicar, yet he somehow always added pavement to Hades.

The failure of his excellent intentions was not, however, at first perceived; and very much was expected from him both by the

upper and lower classes, between whom he drew a definite line—which is rather a dangerous thing to do.

CHAPTER VII.

A MASTER OF HERMENEUTICS.

ALOUETTE :

Papa, I want to know—what is theology?
It seems to me the hardest of the sciences.

ASTROLOGOS :

That much depends upon the way you learn it, child.
I learnt it painfully, from heavy folios :
I let you learn it, being a girl, a feeble thing,
From life of bird and flower, from glowing skies and
 seas,
And God's voice whispering in the morn-wind's
 melody.

ALOUETTE :

To be a feeble girl is some advantage, then.

The Comedy of Dreams.

MRS. MARSTON SEBRIGHT sat one
evening early in May at the drawing-
room window, to catch the last bit of sun-

light for some delicate lace-mending. She has generally an unruffled face : for she has had little trouble, and takes everything quietly. But on this occasion she looked anxious. There was something the matter with Jack ; he was restless and absent-minded, and seldom at home now. He had been accustomed to talk freely with his mother, and now he appeared to avoid conversation with her.

“ When he comes home I will certainly find out what is the matter,” she thought, as she folded up the lace and put her thimble and scissors in the work-basket.

As she went out of the drawing-room she saw Jack, looking hot and dusty, going up the staircase.

“ Hallo, mother,” he called out ; “ I’ve just come in, and am going to get a bath before dinner.”

“ Where have you ridden to-day, Jack ?”

said Mrs. Sebright, following him up the stairs to his bedroom.

“To Copse Hill.”

“Copse Hill again, Jack? Mr. Frowde must be tired of you.”

“Oh! you know, mother, I promised to go and see my old college friend, Mr. Voyd, who has become the vicar of Copse Hill, and we have been talking over old times.”

Jack was a downright honest fellow, and above telling a lie; yet he was trying to make his mother believe that he had gone over to Copse Hill for the sake of seeing the vicar. He had certainly called on the vicar and had a short talk with him on college days; but he was too much interested in some one else to spare time to talk with him. Moreover, the vicar left college soon after Jack entered: so Jack was acting rather deceitfully when he led his mother to suppose that Mr. Voyd was an old friend. But

the old proverb says all is fair in love and war. Lovers' affairs to the outside world are generally very trivial, and there is seldom occasion for secrecy. But to the lovers themselves they are of the greatest importance, and secrecy is observed when there is no necessity for it. A son or daughter who has never had a secret from parents will, when a love affair comes, lock it up, and deem it too sacred for even a beloved parent or sister or brother. So Jack, because he was not in a position to go at once to Mr. Temple for his consent, thought he should like to hide his love for Kate; and, honest as he was, he was ready to say anything that would prevent him from being found out.

When his mother followed him into his bed-room, she closed the door.

"Jack, dear," she said seriously. "I want you to tell me what is the matter. You are

so changed lately. Your manner to me is quite different: sometimes you don't appear to notice when I am speaking to you. Then you are restless, and have lost your appetite, and you don't sleep well, for I continually hear you walking about your room at night. Do tell me what it is, Jack," she said, holding out her hand to him.

Now, Jack was not prepared for this, and was beginning to look very uncomfortable, wondering what he should say. He loved his mother sincerely; and a few weeks ago it would have grieved him for her to have occasion to appeal to him in this way. But his love for his mother seemed so small now compared with his love for Kate.

"Yes, I know I'm restless," said Jack; "and I'm sure I'm sorry, mother, if my manner to you is not the same as ever. I did not know it was different. I'm restless because I've nothing to do; but I think I

shall be all right now, for I've quite made up my mind to please the pater, and go into the Church. And I should like to talk to him this evening about it, if he is not busy. I don't mean to lose time now; and I must not lose time in getting my bath, or I shall be late for dinner."

Mrs. Sebright said no more, though in reality by no means satisfied with Jack's manner. Mothers are usually pretty clear-sighted where their boys are concerned, although we believe they sometimes find it difficult to fathom their girls. However, Jack's all-important conversation with his father was to come off this evening; and this, at any rate, was something gained. She left the dinner-table early, on the plea of a slight headache, thinking her son would find his task easier with a glass of port to help him.

However, Jack had no need for "Dutch courage:" he opened his case as readily as

if he had been the Attorney-General, with the very simple statement—

“Father, I should like very much to take orders as soon as possible.”

The rector looked at him curiously. He knew his youthful impetuosity, and quite expected that some day or other he would come to a sudden resolve; but his present communication was made with startling abruptness. However, he only said :

“I am glad to hear it, my dear boy. Tomorrow I will write to my friend, Dr. Sutton, who has kindly promised to read theology with you for a time.”

Jack's face grew long. He had not thought of this. He dreaded the idea of going to London, drudging away at the most difficult of all sciences, and never being refreshed by a gay glance from the lady of his heart.

“Surely, father,” he urged, “you can

teach me all that I shall require : I hate the thought of leaving home. I am sure I could study very well here."

"No, indeed," was the reply. "I have always looked forward to your being trained by the greatest living master of hermeneutics. I, you know, have for years been busy with the classics : I have fallen far behind the great modern developments of scientific theology ; but Sutton is our most thoughtful and suggestive teacher, and I am grateful that you will have so fine an opportunity of qualifying yourself for a career which has been denied to me. Don't waste it, Jack, for your mother's sake and mine : it is the dream of our lives that you shall fill a prominent place in the Church, and be a worthy grandson of the good and great prelate whose name you bear."

"Will it be a long business, father?" asked Jack, who saw too plainly that his fate was

sealed, and thought in melancholy fashion of the coming trouble. He imagined himself brooding over big folios, and quite unable to make anything of their contents, because a vision of a laughing girl, with the archest face in the world, would always interpose between him and the perplexing page. He imagined himself listening in a half-dream to the wise sayings of the greatest master of hermeneutics, and wondering whether Kate was swinging her pretty feet from that Copse Hill seat, and looking wistfully toward the green winding lane along which he and Bessie were wont to come.

“It will depend chiefly on yourself,” said his father. “Sutton is a marvellous teacher, and if you use the same energy and concentration which you did, to my complete satisfaction, at college, you may satisfy him of your fitness to pass the bishop’s examination in a very few months.”

“A few months!” thought Jack, but he said nothing. A few months of hermeneutics was an awful prospect for this eager lover. He wished he could get over these theological fences as he was wont to take timber with Bessie under him. He had not forgotten all his Greek: he knew that *ἐρμηνεύω* came from Hermes; and, while trying hard to think of something more to say to his father, he was mentally execrating the gayest deity of Olympus for having been name-giver to so dire a science.

“I think I will write to Dr. Sutton to-night,” resumed Mr. Sebright, “and if you are riding early you can take it to the first post for me. Now that, with God’s blessing, you have decided, Jack, I wish to waste no time. I have not hurried you in this, the most important matter in your life—and indeed in mine also—but now I am eager to see you doing work in the Church.

Jack, my dear boy, you have made me very happy ; you will make me happier still if you go on nobly in your career,—if you let me see my only son holding such a position in the Church as I vainly aspired to fill.”

Mr. Sebright went to his study to write his letter. Poor Jack had no spirit to go and talk to his mother, but walked off rather mournfully to bed. His father’s passionate ambition for him, conscientiously suppressed while Jack was unable to make up his mind, almost alarmed him. He had gradually brought himself to look upon the Church as merely the means of settlement in life : now he found that his father expected of him a devotion to his sacred calling which seemed beyond his reach. A very restless night had Jack ; but he could imagine no way of escape. He saw that his father could not endure disappointment now that he had announced his intention to take orders.

Awake long before any other member of the household, he found his father's letter to the formidable doctor on the study table, saddled Bessie himself, and rode off with it across country to the post town.

"Ha, Bessie," he said, when he dropped the letter into the box, "you little know what a deal of trouble this will cause to you and me, and somebody else that is better than either of us."

The great theologian was only too ready to receive Jack, with intent to make a bishop of him. He was under weighty obligations to Marston Sebright. They had been at college together, and, but for Sebright's friendly coaching, Sutton would infallibly have failed to take a degree, having a strange incapacity for classical learning. And for years the proofs of all his books went through the hands of Marston Sebright, who not only corrected them, but also enriched them with

recondite classical illustration. So Dr. Sutton had good reason to oblige his old friend, and he undertook his task with most friendly readiness.

Everything was hurried forward. Mrs. Sebright, with maternal solicitude, provided an outfit for London that would have sufficed for a tour round the world. It was only a day or two before Jack's departure that he could get from Ashton Minima for a flying visit to his friends at Copse Hill. Frowde was busy : Mrs. Frowde soon received all his confidence, and heard of the tremendous task he had to undertake, and laughed him out of much of his trouble.

"Long words generally mean small things," she sagely remarked : "what you take in the mist for a giant is often a boy on a donkey. With your vital energy, you need fear nothing."

"Couldn't you find time to write me a

short note now and then, and tell me about our friends? It would be so kind of you."

"Well, if anything important happens, I'll see what can be done. If Mr. Voyd goes, for example, I think I shall telegraph that you may apply for the living at once. And if Miss Temple should marry, I am sure you will like to hear of it, and get an invitation to the wedding breakfast. By the way, here she is, coming in at the wicket-gate. Do entertain her for a few minutes, for I want to order dinner."

So the two young people wandered away down the lime alley, and Jack Sebright told his story—half ruefully, half hopefully—and she laughed gaily at the sesquipedalian science he had to study, and made him a world happier by her cheery talk. They must keep their secret, they both saw clearly, but it need not be for very long: when Jack was once launched in the ecclesiastic

sea, a priest full grown, he would feel a right to act for himself. And they were young. The rosy future of happy youth lay before them, more delicious than the rosy sunset which just began to creep into the west as they parted.

Riding homeward over the hill, Jack Sebright encountered the vicar, and told him what was about to happen. Mr. Voyd smiled angelically, and remarked that Dr. Sutton was a great and good man, and that no one could fail to profit by his instructions. Then Jack asked him to drive over to Ashton Minima in his absence, and see his father and mother. This the vicar, with his unfailing kindness, promised to do.

But Jack Sebright would not have asked him if he could have known what would come of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLORA SOLITARIA.

Oh, the Earth-Mother's delicate dear ways—

Sweet south-wind breath, flower-fragrance, bird-song clear—

Which say, "Be fearless in these troublous days,
My child, for I am near."

"**WE** are of the earth, earthy." This is no crime, for we are sons of earth. I am not going to write theology. Lord Palmerston is responsible for the statement that all babies are born good, and I fear many people are heterodox enough to agree with him. He disliked the dogma of

original sin, but he certainly liked an original sinner.

Flora was of the earth, earthy. She trembled to every change of wooing or repelling wind. She had been, there is no question, a very naughty girl indeed; but hers was rather a weak and negative naughtiness. Early in her girlhood this poor Flora—a child with strange sensitiveness and a soul that lacked strength—was married by arrangement to one of the best and wisest men in the world. His goodness and wisdom did not enable him to understand his wife. Had he been able to see her as she was, he would have developed her into a creature most loveable. Unhappily, he had not the insight; she seemed to him capricious and frivolous and fretful—nothing more. So there was estrangement between them; and she, a fragile epiphyte, unable to exist alone, fell into the hands of an adroit un-

scrupulous villain, who cared little for her save as a momentary toy, but whose interest in her grew intense when he found that by ruining her he could make at least three people unhappy for life. She gave way to this fiendish temper: she was divorced from her husband; she was scornfully deserted by the man to whom she owed her evil fate. Then, longing to forget remorse in excitement, she sought gaiety everywhere.

Poor Flora! It is curious that when that inconsequent yet honourable gentleman, Lord Arun, made sincere love to her, it awoke in her frivolous soul something like conscience. She rather looked down upon Arun. He was such a boy. He could not put half-a-dozen words together without being ridiculous. Ay, but so thorough a gentleman! The absolute honour of that simple youth touched poor Flora to the heart. It awoke in her the virtue of self-sacrifice. She saw

that, even if she told Lord Arun the tale of her past life in all its sadness, he yet would desire to marry her. She resolved that he should not. She liked him very much, but she would not do him the injury of marriage. Perhaps she faintly saw that, under the guidance of a woman wise and pure, even Lord Arun might show that he was not a fool. Women are for the guidance of men: men for the support and defence of women.

Flora Trevor had told Lord Arun that she was going to Paris. It was a story; she had no such intention. All naughty girls are story-tellers; all good women are truth-tellers by a necessity which they cannot escape. Womanhood in its purity hates a lie. Flora, in a new phase of her many caprices, thought that she would be quiet awhile. She had seen advertised a furnished house in the village of Rowell St. Dunstan

(where the church is dedicated to that great prelate who defied the devil, and the fact that the grounds were surrounded by a wall eight feet high, with *chevaux-de-frise* on the top, seemed to secure isolation. Isolation was at this moment Flora's leading idea. Quite away from all the world she might perhaps lead a penitent if not a pious life. She took the place, and went down at once, Estelle wondering whether there was any one to talk to in such a rustic neighbourhood.

"I will find some one," she said to herself; "they are dull, these English, but they cannot resist wit and beauty. The English farmer will be a new discovery. He is big, I have heard. I like men of a grand mould. I will study the English farmer."

So Estelle: let us hope she will succeed. But her mistress, poor erring creature, only wanted to bury herself now, and be quite

forgotten, and live unknown to the world within those walls eight feet high, with *chevaux-de-frise* at the top. There she would try to be good, she thought—try to expiate her sins by a quiet life and charity to the poor. She had much the feeling of a frightened bird. She had no real remorse, but a strange sadness oppressed her. She had done wrong, and knew not how to make amends. Perhaps it was only a momentary mood.

At any rate, there she settled herself with a curious feeling of relief. She was playing hide and seek, and thought she was doing it cleverly. She wanted to get away beyond Lord Arun's reach ; for she had allowed him to go so far that she feared he might insist on going one step farther. This was not all. She was well aware that Arundel Lifton was watching her with stern amusement, and she was delighted to place herself

beyond his reach—beyond his knowledge. This at least she hoped to have done. Yet, behind that eight-foot wall with its *chevaux-de-frise* she sometimes trembled a little at the thought of being discovered by Arundel Lifton. She had such a dread of his omniscience.

He, on the other hand, could she but have known it, was rather puzzled and annoyed by her disappearance. He had intended an awkward imbroglio betwixt her and Lord Arun, when behold, she suddenly vanishes, and Arun, who is perfectly truthful and transparent, has not the remotest idea what has become of her. Indeed he bemoans his fate pertinaciously to Lifton, and Lifton gets very tired of him.

“She promised she’d write to me,” Arun says, in Lifton’s snug Albany chambers, where he comes for advice and consolation. “I say, Arundel—Paris, you know, by Jove, it’s such a dangerous place—don’t you

think something may have happened to her?"

"Of course I do. She has found somebody more amusing than you—though that would be difficult."

"Now do be serious, old fellow."

"Serious! With you? My dear boy, you're a perennial farce—only you carry your comic vein too far now and then. What says the poet?—

‘Lord! ’tis the most infernal bore,
Of all the bores I know,
To have a friend who’s lost his heart
A short time ago.’”

"I suppose that's Shakespeare," said Arun; "I've heard something very like it before, but I think there was a gipsy in it. I'll tell you what, Arundel—don't you see? this won't do. I shall run over to Paris; it's not such a big place—I shall soon find her. She's too pretty not to be known."

“Pshaw !” said Lifton. “Better far forget all about her. Stay here, go to the House, marry some woman in our own set, with a style that will do you credit. It’s absurd, with your name and property, for you to be running after a wild creature like this, just as if she were a fit person to be Lady Arun. Marry sensibly. You couldn’t have a finer woman than Sarum’s daughter.”

“Fine woman ! Now if there’s anything I hate, you see, it’s that sort of creature—cart-horse style, don’t you know? Yes, and she’s, what d’ye call it?—a howler; goes and reads papers about things I never heard of—astronomy and gastronomy and botany and phlebotomy—and moves votes of thanks to herself. I don’t see it, thank you, Arundel. You’re as cold-blooded, don’t you know? as the Old Serpent, whoever he was. Good-bye.”

“*Au revoir*,” said Lifton. “Write and tell me if you find her. She’ll have got hold of somebody else, and refuse to give him up unless you promise to marry her. Don’t be such an awful fool as that.”

“I’d marry her this minute if she’d let me,” said the impetuous youth, rushing away without another word. Arundel Lifton smiled grimly, thinking of many things.

Thus, while Lord Arun was execrating the tardy pace at which it seemed to him the steamer travelled, Flora Trevor was hidden away behind that lofty wall at Rowell St. Dunstan. The change pleased her. The carefully enclosed garden had plentiful turf, brilliant flower-beds, large bird-haunted trees. In this quietude she buried herself, and seemed for the time perfectly content, to the amazement of restless Estelle. But Flora’s temperament,

though impulsive, was intensely lazy. She became vicious rather through indolence. It was too much trouble to resist temptation.

Flora did not stir outside the walls of her well-guarded garden. She left Estelle to manage the servants, who were old-fashioned and quiet. There was a pony-carriage on the premises, but she was not tempted to drive. She did not go to the old church dedicated to St. Dunstan, and never saw the noble east window in which the great prelate is depicted, red-hot tongs in hand, seizing the horny proboscis of the frightened fiend. The rector called, as in duty bound, but saw no one save Estelle, from whose rather bewildered excuses he concluded his new parishioner was not quite sane.

As to Estelle, she wandered out at intervals in the long lonely village street, and

did the requisite shopping, and saw no bucolic hero worthy of assault.

“I am tired of this,” she thought. “Brighton was better. The Great British farmer is a mistake.”

CHAPTER IX.

FORNCETT'S DINNER PARTY.

ALOUETTE :

Surely the Emperor is too old for love, papa,
And yet he weds the girlish Countess Isola.

ASTROLOGOS :

Hush ! whisper not that Emperors can e'er grow old !
At any rate, Love cannot. In the granite rocks
Fire dwells, and often here are hidden water springs,
And the most delicate flowers and mosses cover them.

The Comedy of Dreams.

“THE master’s a-coming out, Mr. Ralph,”
said the cook at The Birches, when
Ralph made an order for dinner for five.
“I began to think I was never to have any
cooking to do worth speaking of, though it’s

something to do to please you, Mr. Ralph; you know it is."

"Oh! you needn't be counting on nothing to do, Mary; for I daresay we shall be having his lordship here soon, and the young lord. And though the old gentleman's quiet enough, the young one must have everything tip-top. You'll have to look sharp then."

"And who is coming to-morrow night?" said the cook.

"Only some neighbours," said Ralph: "the author and his wife, and Mr. and Miss Temple."

"Oh, that is the pretty young lady. Perhaps master 'll go falling in love with her."

"Now, none of your nonsense, Mary," said Ralph, rather sharply, for this was a sore subject, as he thought there was something wrong with his master on this point;

“your head is always going on love and marriage, Mary. The master and I have been about together for many years now, and we’ve neither of us any thoughts of marrying, thank God!”

“Really, Mr. Ralph, you’re very sharp on me, and you speak of us poor women as if we was to be avoided like snakes. But, there! them that is so high and mighty is generally took in at last, and mostly by widows. I can’t a-bear to see the way the widows go after the men, a-taking away the chances of us gals.”

“Don’t call yourself a girl, do you?” said Ralph.

“My age is nothing to you, sir,” said Mary, getting angry. “And,” she continued, getting bold in her anger, “you’ve no call to boast of you and the master not being in love, for I’ll swear the master is. We poor women you despise so can see

farther than you men ; and it's no good to tell me the master ain't in love. I can see all about it. Why, if ever I wants a bit of a walk, and thinks I shall be out of sight just going round behind the trees there, I meet the master as sure as fate tramping up and down, and looking so unhappy-like ; and why should he choose that bit of walk but to see the young lady opposite ?”

“ And why should you choose it, but to look out in the road, and spy what is going on, and see the young men passing ?”

“ And why shouldn't I look at a young man now and then, Mr. Ralph ? You can't expects me always to be content with seeing nothing but the cabbages in the kitchen-garden.”

“ Well, Mary, I don't suppose you mean any harm,” said Ralph, rather softly ; “ but it isn't your business to go talking of your master in that way. It don't so much mat-

ter what you say to me, but just keep you your tongue in your head, my girl, so far as other people are concerned."

"All right, Mr. Ralph: you may trust me for knowing when to speak and when to shut up."

"Yes, Mary, I know you're a good little woman; and when we go away for the shooting in the autumn, I shall be quite comfortable at leaving you in charge of the place."

This little speech, intended for a compliment to Mary, did not seem to have the desired effect, for she looked sad, and said,

"Ah! we don't know what may happen before the autumn, Mr. Ralph."

Ralph left the kitchen looking very miserable. The idea of his master ever marrying was his greatest trouble. He cared for no one in the world except Mr. Forncett: he may be said almost to have

worshipped him. He would certainly not have considered it right to hold any religious belief apart from him. Wherever his master was going in the next world, he must go with him. His master believed in God, and he believed in his master; that was sufficient for him. But what if a woman came between them? That was a dreadful idea. And all these years, while they had been knocking about together in all parts of the world, Mr. Forncett had shown no sign of falling in love. "It's very hard," thought Ralph, "that we no sooner come to a little place like this than master's head must be upset, and all about that little girl. I'm afraid it is too true, Perhaps the shooting will cure him."

Ralph had hardened from circumstances—not precisely into a misogynist, for he thought women useful enough in their way, and valuable contributors to comfort, amuse-

ment, and ornament—but rather into a woman despiser. Without having read the Koran, he shared the opinion of the False Prophet that they have no souls worth speaking of. So, when it seemed to him that his master, for whom he had the affection of an old-fashioned servitor, was likely to be entrapped by a flighty little thing like Miss Temple, he was naturally both alarmed and disgusted.

His attachment to Forncett was in some degree connected with his experience of women. A smart young fellow he had been in his time; and when in his first situation as footman, in a large country house in Devonshire, he had won the heart of a pretty lady's maid, no giantess of the west, but a little gay creature of Nottinghamshire birth, who had first seen service in the Dukeries. She set her cap at tall, soldier-like Ralph with remarkable assiduity: he

soon surrendered at discretion, and grew to idolize her. "All went merry as a marriage bell," and Ralph lived for months in a fool's paradise. They were to wed in due time. Ralph had become so useful and so trusted that his master had promised to make him butler, and to give him a cottage on the estate. He was on a pinnacle of happiness, and looked forward to a life of honourable labour and of happy love.

The house was growing full for the shooting season, and among the arrivals was Lord Arthur Elvet, from Elvet Hall, Nottinghamshire—a younger son, a boy of eighteen, beautiful as Adonis. Ralph noticed that his Emma first turned white, and then blushed, when Lord Arthur's coming was mentioned; but he merely connected these slight signs of emotion with the exclamation of a sharp-tongued maid, not famous for personal attraction, who said,

“Why, Emma, Elvet Hall is where you used to be. What sort of a gentleman is Lord Arthur?”

“Oh! he is no more than a boy,” cried Emma, scornfully. And as she was probably six or seven years his senior, the remark was justified.

But it was soon obvious to the servants’ hall that the boy in question was a precocious youth, and that he and Emma had been assisting in educating each other two years before at Elvet Hall. Ralph, the person most concerned, was of course the last to discover anything; for Emma, who had generally been fond of teasing him, and trying his temper a little, was at this time as sweet as honey. He suspected nothing, though all the others were laughing at his blindness, till one day, being sent suddenly on a message to his mistress, who was in the conservatories, he made a short cut across a

retired part of the gardens, and saw Lord Arthur and the fickle lady's maid alone in a quiet arbour. They saw him also. Emma sprang from her seat to run away; but Lord Arthur held her by the waist, saying, with intent that Ralph should hear it,

“What is the fellow to you?”

Ralph said nothing. He grieved silently. But somebody spoke: Emma was sent away by the housekeeper; and neither the master nor mistress of the house deemed it necessary to rebuke Lord Arthur for his flagrant breach of the laws which govern hospitality among English ladies and gentlemen. As for him, being elegantly chaffed by some of his friends, he remarked,

“Deuced shame to send her away. She's a nice amusing little thing.”

So Emma was forgotten—by everyone save Ralph.

Soon after his departure, Frank Forncett

came on a brief visit. He had just received the heavy blow from which time brought no recovery, and had determined to travel. He was an intuitive physiognomist, and something about Ralph's face attracted him.

"I wish you could spare that man of yours to travel with me," he said: "I like his looks."

"You are welcome to him," replied the master of the house. "I hope he won't prove a failure. He was a capital servant, and I meant to make him butler; but he was fool enough to fall in love with a flighty little maid-servant, and she threw him over for somebody else, and the disappointment has made him stupid."

In this way did Ralph become "fidus Achates" to Frank Forncett. There was a kind of tacit sympathy between them, which after years of travel mellowed into that friendship between master and servant

which is in these days so rare. Considering the history of that friendship, it was no wonder that Ralph felt jealous when there seemed a chance of his master being the victim of a woman, after all.

He determined to watch him carefully during the dinner at which Kate Temple would be present, and he imagined that he would be able easily to judge whether there was any cause for his anxiety.

Now it so happened that when Kate, dressed for dinner, went to show herself to Leonora for approval, Leonora remarked : " Yes, my dear girl, you look all that your father could wish ; and now I want you to be pleasant to Mr. Forncett, and talk to him as much as you can. You will please me if you will do your best to be amiable to him ; and tell me afterwards exactly what you think of him."

" Yes, mamma," said Kate. But her face

suddenly lost its brightness. "What can mamma mean?" she thought, and a vision of Jack rose up before her, and she wondered whether her father was arranging a marriage with Mr. Forncett for her. Before she knew Jack such an idea would not have occurred to her; but now that Jack was always first in her thoughts she connected everything with him. She was even ready to be deceitful for Jack's sake, as he had been for hers, and she put on a forced expression of cheerfulness lest Leonora should read her thoughts.

At dinner she was placed by Mr. Frowde, and talked merrily to him, and even Ralph's jealous eyes could detect nothing.

But after dinner she sat with Mr. Forncett on a couch, and to judge from her animated expression she was carrying out Leonora's instruction.

Ralph brought in the tea and coffee, and

was so clumsy in his management of the tray that he attracted his master's attention.

"Why, Ralph," he said, "if you, the most careful of men, are clumsy, I shall think the skies will fall."

However, Ralph's mind was somewhat relieved before the end of the evening.

When the guests were going away, Mr. Forncett was in the hall, giving Kate some messages for Leonora.

"Well," thought Ralph, "I can see it is all right in that quarter; and there can't be anything up with Mrs. Temple, because she's married: but there's a mystery somewhere. And then she evidently knew him before I did, from the message he sent her."

This was a bitter thought, as Ralph adored his master to such an extent that he was jealous of everyone who had known him before.

When Kate returned home she found Leonora waiting for her.

“I didn’t think it worth while to keep Lisette up, as I could not tell how late you would be, so I will help you to undress, Kate.”

“Oh, I can manage, thank you, mamma.”

“I might as well help you, child,” said Leonora, calmly, though her heart was beating fast with anxiety to hear what Kate had to say of Frank Forncett.

Kate was full of excitement.

“Oh, mamma!” she said, as soon as they were upstairs alone, “I like Mr. Forncett so much! Why didn’t you tell me you knew him?”

“Because I only found it out a short time ago,” she replied.

Kate went running on in praise of Mr. Forncett. Presently she said :

“He is such a good noble man : he ought

to have a beautiful good wife to love him and admire him. Do you know, mamma, there is only one woman I have ever seen that seems good enough for him."

"Who is that, Kate?"

"Why, you of course."

"Oh, you little goose," said Leonora, "go to sleep;" and she kissed her and was leaving the room.

"Mamma!" said Kate softly.

"Yes," said Leonora, with her hand on the handle of the door.

"Do come here a minute. I want to whisper something; come very close to the bed."

"Yes, child; what is it?"

"Did you once love Mr. Forncett?"

"Yes, darling."

They held hands for a moment silently, then Leonora left the room. If she had stayed another five minutes the whole

secret about Jack would have been out, and trouble to come caused by mischief-making tongues would have been saved.

But the calm and heroic Leonora could contain her feelings no longer, and she wanted to be alone to give way to them. She was too much agitated for it to occur to her that Kate would hardly have been so discerning or so sympathetic unless she knew herself what love was.

Kate tossed about in bed, perplexed with many thoughts. She longed for sympathy; and she was half inclined to get out of bed and go to Leonora's room and sympathize with her, and tell her about Jack. Then she remembered that Jack wished her to keep the secret, and it was not for long. Then she wondered what had separated Leonora and Mr. Forncett; and she thought that, if anything should ever part her from Jack, she could not bear it as Leonora did, but it

would kill her. Then she thought of the difference between Leonora and herself, and Jack and Mr. Forncett. She thought Mr. Forncett a great man, who would be above trouble, as Leonora was. But she thought of Jack as perfect, but not a great man. "And I don't want him to be great, or he wouldn't match me," she said to herself. At last she fell asleep. When she awoke next morning she had no longer any great desire to get rid of her secret about Jack, but she felt a relief in knowing that there was some one who understood what love meant. Young people when they fall in love are apt to forget that their parents have (let us hope) passed through the same sort of experience, and they are afraid they will get no sympathy.

Perhaps the parents themselves sometimes forget what happened so long ago, and have no sympathy to give. But Kate now rea-

lized that Leonora once loved, and was still beloved.

Leonora felt Kate's sympathy in every action and look, yet it did not occur to her that there was any special reason for such sympathy. At least, not yet.

CHAPTER X.

GOOD INTENTIONS.

RAFAEL (*reading a letter*):

The Count means well, Astrologos.

ASTROLOGOS:

Often we find well-meaning men most mischievous.
He means well who means nothing—that's the worst
of it—

Who aims to do the right, but cannot see the right,
Whose will is warped by the first gust of circumstance.

The Comedy of Dreams.

SUMMER passed on, with its cool splendour of sunrises—each a new gift of beauty from the Almighty Artist who has never painted twice alike—with its ever-changeable sunsets and cool twilights, de-

licious after the too sultry magnificence of noon—and Jack Sebright, doing work that he disliked under the guidance of the Rev. Dr. Sutton, could only dream of the indescribable loveliness which brooded on Copse Hill. To Jack's mind there was no perfect summer possible anywhere save at Copse Hill, for there Kate Temple dwelt. There was heat, of course, and sunlight; there were flowers and trees in other insignificant places; but only on the very centre of the world would Apollo shower the cream of his delight—the fiery luxury of his summer joy. And the centre of the world was where one gay young girl—often described by her critics as “plain,” “flighty,” “forward,” and many other depreciative epithets—lived a happy life, and did not quite forget Jack Sebright.

Hard upon Jack, was it not? to be exiled in a London suburb at the leafiest season of

the year—when all the roses were in full bloom (and Copse Hill is a place much loved by the Queen of Flowers)—when the lime alley was impenetrable, and the pigeons cooed incessantly, and the only unpleasant noise was from a gun in some neighbouring cherry orchard, whose owner expended more powder in frightening birds from the cherries than the cherries (a poor sort) would ever pay for. Jack, with a folio before him, and the bland stately form of the reverend doctor at the other end of the library, was wont to sit where he could see a quiet suburban garden, with turf and a sun-dial, and a tame raven stalking up and down—a raven that had been a real solace to Jack;—for when, in idle moments, Jack went into the garden and talked to that raven, that old bird turned on him his keen tawny eye, and seemed to understand every word he said. Jack and the raven were

great friends ; and I take that to be very gracious of the raven, a prince among birds, who might well have declined to associate with a youngster about a fourth his own age and a millionth his experience. That raven's name was Peter : he had belonged to Dr. Sutton's predecessor in the house, and had declined to leave it when that gentleman went elsewhere. Peter was not at all on good terms with Dr. Sutton, whom he clearly deemed an intruder ; and he always regarded himself as true owner of the premises. However, he patronized Jack.

It was one of those summers in which opponent forces meet. The noon of the year brought both stimulus and languor. At such times you feel you can do anything—you desire to do nothing. Only predominant passions have real power at such periods : these strong summers develop

lovers and patriots. Under their electric influence boys and nations assert their manhood. I am afraid that in Jack Sebright's case the summer stimulus acted on his love—the summer languor on his theologic studies. But the Rev. Dr. Sutton was not hard upon him. He felt certain no examining chaplain would pluck a son of Marston Sebright, coached by Onesimus Sutton, S.T.P.

Notwithstanding the consolation of Peter, the time passed heavily with Jack Sebright. Dr. Sutton was so wearily wise, and he had only just grown acquainted with people who were quite as wise as the reverend doctor, but who mingled their wisdom with wit. Jack fancied he found much platitude and fallacy in the doctor's magniloquent prelections: he thought he had heard eternal truths more clearly stated on Manly Frowde's lawn; he began to hate the idea

of taking his theology more as a profession than a faith. Jack was too sincere.

Yet was he not without pleasant news of his lady love. Mrs. Frowde, though she had multitudinous engagements—for she helped her husband in his work, and acted as his secretary, and yet kept her house and garden in charming order—was too kind not to write Jack a letter of gossip now and then. Indeed, she saw that he was just the fine young fellow who would profit from the correspondence of a married lady. She described to him Kate Temple, singing joyously on the lawn in the happy afternoons, mocking a nightingale that sang madly all day in a beech-tree on the common outside. She pictured her delight when a brown squirrel scampered across the lawn, and ran like lightning up the straight stem of a larch, and sprang into the boughs of a wild

cherry, where he sat, grave as judge on bench or parson in pulpit, looking down upon the folk below him, and eating his fruit with all the more enjoyment that the bipeds beneath had no chance of any. She usually mentioned Kate Temple in her letters : whether this was cruel or kind let us leave to the casuistry of love.

However, Mrs. Frowde's kindly notes—together with the advice he received from the venerable raven, Peter—kept Jack from rebelling against Dr. Sutton's hermeneutics. We regret that Jack, who had a talent for caricature, which the Church should discourage in those who aspire to be its servants, sent Mrs. Frowde portraits of Dr. Onesimus Sutton which did not arouse reverence. It is to be feared that Jack was unfair to his kind tutor : else it is certain that the loftiness of Dr. Sutton's forehead

was quite disproportionate to the shortness of his legs. However, we all know where the brain is to found.

Kate, who by this time was quite at home with the Frowdes—much to the delight of her father and Leonora, who dreaded above all things that her happy childhood might be spoilt by her strange position—used to come through the wicket gate when she would, and talk to the birds and the dogs, and feel at home. She had found her way into the hearts of her friends. They saw in her a guileless girl, worthy of treading the same virgin turf that welcomed the fair feet of Shakespeare's Miranda and Rosalind ; and when they also beheld in Jack Sebright just the sort of fellow that might have been Ferdinand or Orlando, they felt that the eternal Poem of Love, whose first lyric was sung in the Garden of the Four Rivers, was to be dramatised over again.

So, feeling that no harm could come of such loyal intercourse, and intermingling a little humour with that intercourse, they did all they honourably could for the young lovers.

Kate sometimes wondered, when Mrs. Frowde chaffed her about Jack, whether she guessed her secret, and felt half inclined to tell her ; but she always argued with herself that Jack wished her to be silent, and it would not be for long.

She had come to connect the Frowdes and their cottage so entirely with Jack that she found continual excuses for running in through the wicket gate, so that she scarcely passed a day without spending some time with Mrs. Frowde, until it occurred to her that she might seem to be neglecting her father: Therefore she sometimes punished herself by determining to keep away from the cottage for a whole day.

One afternoon while Kate was standing at Mrs. Frowde's desk, sending nonsensical messages to Jack, and wishing she could send earnest ones, the worthy Vicar of Copse Hill was trotting along the lanes towards Ashton Minima with intent to call on the Reverend Marston Sebright, Jack having genially suggested it. His horse was not a good one to look at—or to go ; he hacked it in a curious gig that he kept, so high that Mrs. Voyd found it difficult to climb into it ; but he was wont to say that such sublunary considerations were beneath the sacerdotal character. And who can gainsay it ? He thought loftily of his vocation, but of himself humbly. Still in many matters he puzzled those who firmly believed in his sincerity of purpose. The vicar took twice as long to get to Ashton Minima as Jack on Bessie wanted for the reverse journey. The difference in the quality of their steeds was not

the only reason. Jack begrudged every minute that he spent on the road, when he had a hope to see Kate at the end of it; but the vicar took his time, and reflected as he jogged along on the manifest improvement which he had happily effected in his parish in so short a period, and wondered whether the Rev. Marston Sebright was a clergyman of sympathetic disposition, and like-minded with himself.

He reached the rectory full of his best intentions. Mr. Sebright was at home, and received him courteously, and expressed his pleasure that an old friend of his son's was in the neighbourhood.

"He has at last made up his mind to take orders," said the rector, "and is reading with Sutton."

"A high privilege," said Voyd.

"Yes, Sutton has the modern theology at his fingers' ends. He has mastered all the

German men, and might be trusted to draw up a perfect scheme of the orthodoxy of the hour—a thing most difficult, seeing how orthodoxy fluctuates. Whether my son will do credit to his tutor, it is hard to say; but he did well in mathematics, which he hates; and I hope he may do as well in theology, which I know he does not care about. Hatred is often a fine motive power.”

Mr. Voyd did not quite follow his reverend brother, who, tall and spare, with long white hair, keen eyes under white eyebrows, eagle nose, a firm curved mouth, gesticulating with long talon-like fingers, was a picture Vandyck might have painted. It took the vicar some time to think what to say. At length he remarked :

“I think my friend Mr. Sebright will throw his whole heart into parish work.”

“I hope he will not,” replied Marston Sebright, “if by parish work is understood

prying into poor people's affairs, and patronizing them, and encouraging gossip, and doing charitable work that should be imposed on the pious women of the parish. It is terrible to think that just now that old cry, 'The Church is in danger,' might well be raised—not because politicians attack the Church, not because the people are disaffected to the Church, for they were never more loyal, but because the clergy, split into many sects on mere trivial points, are doing their utmost to destroy the Church. The laymen are our best defence. You have a parishioner—Frowde—who has done more for the parish by his writings than you and I together could ever hope to do."

"Is he orthodox?" asked Mr. Voyd.

"My dear sir, are you orthodox to-day? And, if you are quite sure of that, shall you be orthodox to-morrow. Theology is a science which cannot stand still: it is the

knowledge of God, and every moment adds to that knowledge in some way. When I see the stolid way in which most of my contemporaries view the work they have in hand, I ask the question put to Ezekiel in the Valley of Vision, 'Can these bones live?' I don't mean Jack to be a dry bone: his grandfather was a great prelate, a vigorous leader of the Church; and if Jack has not power to follow in his steps, I shall deeply regret his becoming a clergyman. But forgive me, I am talking too much of my only son—a father's fault. Here is Mrs. Sebright. Will you not have some luncheon?"

That quiet old lady had just entered the library, to say that luncheon was on the table. She liked Mr. Voyd—at first sight.

"I must ask you to excuse me," said the rector to Mr. Voyd. "Mrs. Sebright will do her best to entertain you, especially as you are a friend of our boy's. I have en-

gaged to be over at Lord Manaton's at two, about a Bill that we are both interested in : as it is, I fear I shall be late."

Indeed, the rector's dog-cart had been at the door for ten minutes, the horse impatiently pawing the gravel. Leaving his wife and Mr. Voyd to lunch together, he drove off at a fast trot, saying to himself,

"Puppy-parsons ruin the Church."

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE'S USUAL TROUBLES.

ALOUETTE.

"The course of true love never did run smooth," they say.

I want to know, papa, is false love fortunate?

ASTROLOGOS.

Of all things on this earth the most unfortunate—
Annihilating souls. False love is hatred, child,

Ἐπίγειος, ψυχικὴ, δαιμονιώδης :

In this the great Apostle of false wisdom spake—
And love is wisdom, or it is not love at all.

The Comedy of Dreams.

THE Reverend Vypar Voyd was not very favourably impressed with the Reverend Marston Sebright, so the good intentions with which he came laden remained

unfulfilled. But a *tête-à-tête* luncheon with Mrs. Sebright seemed to give hopes of fulfilling them.

Mr. Voyd had a suasive manner, which women always admire in men, but which men do not admire in men.

Mrs. Sebright was essentially a womanly woman. She was shrewd in a certain way, but she was easily imposed upon. She would not tell a lie herself, so she believed all that was told her.

She had a proper reverence for the priestly office, and was a willing listener when anyone talked in praise of her son. Therefore she was the very person the vicar wanted at this moment.

After some general conversation she began—

“Then you saw a good deal of my son at Copse Hill?”

“Well, no, indeed, I much regret that I

did not. It would have given me the greatest pleasure to see more of him, for I have a very pleasant remembrance of him at college : and really I think I may say I might have been of some use to him."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Sebright, "I thought he often went to see you."

"No," answered Mr. Voyd hesitatingly, as if he would indicate that he was perplexed whether he ought to say anything to Jack's disadvantage, and yet it was his duty to speak the truth—"No, I am sorry he did not call on me oftener, for I might have warned him before of becoming too intimate with dangerous characters."

"Good gracious! Mr. Voyd," said Mrs. Sebright, betrayed in her anxiety into the strongest expression she ever used, "you don't mean to say my boy associated with dangerous people? He knew no one but Mr. Frowde, and I have heard my hus-

band speak in the highest terms of Mr. Frowde."

"My dear lady, I am afraid Mr. Sebright is very much mistaken in Mr. Frowde. You see I know him personally, and I can assure you that Mr. Frowde is a most dangerous character."

"But how?" said Mrs. Sebright, looking very anxious.

"In every way I consider him a bad man—a *very* bad man; and it grieved me to the heart to see my old friend so intimate with him;" and Mr. Voyd's tone became almost lachrymose.

"Are you sure of this, Mr. Voyd?"

"I am sure you need not doubt *me*, Mrs. Sebright," and he looked at her in his most suasive manner. Mrs. Sebright was mechanically crumbling up the piece of bread by her plate, and looking very miserable. She did not doubt Mr. Voyd, and she now began

to recall incidents which in her mind confirmed what he said.

“Now I remember,” she said, “how very anxious Jack was that I should never go to call on Mrs. Frowde. Of course, he did not want me to see them. Is Mrs. Frowde as bad as her husband?”

“Quite so, I am afraid,” said the Vicar, shaking his head solemnly. “Indeed, I often feel that with a good woman there might be some hope for poor Mr. Frowde, whom I pity very much—I really pity him ; but with such a woman as Mrs. Frowde, who joins him and encourages him in everything he does, there is no hope for him—no hope,” and he shook his head more solemnly than ever.

“My son never did care to associate with bad people,” said Mrs. Sebright ; “so I suppose there is some peculiar fascination in the Frowdes?”

“Mr. Frowde is considered to be a man of genius, and such men are, I believe, fascinating to some people. I was myself fortunately—most fortunately—warned against him by my wife’s parents, though I do not think I should in any case have admired him; but I am sorry to say that some of my parishioners are led away—completely led away—by him.” Mr. Voyd had a habit of emphasizing his sentences by repeating some particular word with the addition of an adjective or adverb. “The fascination of his genius,” he continued, “makes him the more dangerous.”

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Sebright, “what is to be done to prevent Jack from seeing those people again?” She had so thoroughly persuaded herself of the badness of the Frowdes that she already hated them, and began to think of them as “*these people*.”

“It might be easily managed,” said Mr.

Voyd, "but there is, I am afraid, more mischief behind. I really feel, my dear Mrs. Sebright, that I may perhaps, in my great regard for your son, be causing you much unhappiness; but I can assure you I do it with the hope of doing good in the end. And if I can be of any service to you in reclaiming your son from the vicious company into which he has lately got, I shall be glad—very glad."

"Do, please, tell me everything, Mr. Voyd, and you will win my everlasting gratitude; for my son is everything to me, and if he were to disgrace his family I could not outlive it. You don't know how much I suffered before he went away because of the change I observed in him, though I little guessed the true cause. Pray tell me everything."

"Your son has, I am afraid, made very

undesirable acquaintances at Mr. Frowde's house," said Mr. Voyd, proceeding cautiously.

"Yes," said Mrs. Sebright.

"One, a Mr. Forncett, is, I should think, from the little I have seen and heard of him, a pagan,—a thorough pagan; and I am sure you will agree with me that such a man is dangerous to one like your son, who has scarcely settled views of religion."

"Certainly, very dangerous."

"Then there's a family called Temple, who, from all I can gather, are not reputable people. Mr. Temple and his daughter certainly attend church sometimes; but I am afraid there is reason—good reason—to suppose that he is not living respectably with the person called Mrs. Temple."

"Good gracious! Mr. Voyd. And did

those people introduce my dear boy to anyone so disreputable?"

"Yes, and not only that, my dear lady, "but"—and he lowered his voice as he came to the climax of Jack's crimes, and leaned across the table to Mrs. Sebright—"he is, I am afraid, entangled in some way with Miss Temple."

"Oh, Mr. Voyd!" said Mrs. Sebright, bursting into tears, "what shall I do? I could not have believed Jack would ever have behaved so badly to me."

"Pray calm yourself, my dear Mrs. Sebright, and let us think what can be done. Do not blame your son: it is not his fault. He has been led into it all by the Frowdes. Perhaps we may yet save him further trouble."

"What can we do?" said Mrs. Sebright, imploringly, looking to Mr. Voyd as her deliverer. "Hadn't you better see his father?"

“N—o,” said Mr. Voyd, who did not care for another interview with Mr. Marston Sebright, “I think, if you will allow me to make a suggestion, I should say it would be best to keep the matter entirely secret from his father: there is no knowing how angry he might be. I think if you will leave the matter to me, Mrs. Sebright, I may, with your help, be able to do something. But we must be quiet for the present, till I can hear something more certain concerning the Temple family. I am making inquiries everywhere. Your son will not be home yet, you say, so we have time.”

“I am sure I can never thank you enough, my dear Mr. Voyd—you have made me your debtor for life.”

“I hope I may deserve your gratitude. I really think it will be best—decidedly best—not to mention the matter to your husband at present.”

The Rev. Vypar Voyd rode home again, congratulating himself that he had done a kind and priestly action.

CHAPTER XII.

S H E E P A N D G O A T S.

ALOUETTE :

Papa, the cardinal-legate's sermon puzzled me.
Which are the sheep and which the goats, I want to
know ?

I think a goat upon a mountain pinnacle
Is happier than a sheep in heavy meadow land.

ASTROLOGOS :

Heaven's Zodiac hath both Capricorn and Aries.
The spiritual Zodiac is not narrower.

The Comedy of Dreams.

COPSE HILL soon began to show results
of the vicar's attempts at reform.
There certainly were some hardened sinners
who declined to be reformed, and who
were wont to laugh at the vicar's good

intentions. There were others who expressed their opinion that "too many of old Uriah's ways were introduced into the parish," for the Rev, Uriah Urgent was not a universal favourite. But leaving these bad people out of the question, there was a decided change in the behaviour of many of the villagers. The vicar's sermons were outspoken and earnest. Perhaps occasionally he was a little obscure when trying to explain the doctrines of the Church. His doctrinal sermons showed signs of having been made up from the commentators, and in such a way as to present rather a hash of ideas; but he meant well, and was anxious that his flock should not miss the chance of salvation through ignorance of Church dogma.

But it was when his sermons had a moral tone that he pleased his audience. He so denounced bad people as to make those who

prided themselves on being good feel very comfortable ; in fact, he drew so hard and fast a line between good and bad, that there was little difficulty in discovering the sheep from the goats. And so into sheep and goats the village was very soon divided. It was done with the best intentions, but was, perhaps, scarcely a wise arrangement : the sheep were apt to think too much of their own goodness, and to look down on the goats. Still the goats had a chance held out to them of going over to the side of the sheep, for Mr. Voyd taught that the way to live virtuously was to go to church regularly and keep out of debt ; and as it is of course very easy to do these things, there should have been no bad people in Mr. Voyd's flock. If there should happen to be any unfortunate man in Copse Hill who, though he attended church regularly, found his business matters did not run

as smoothly as he could wish, Mr. Voyd's teachings may have had the effect of making him lose hope and become desperate. There are many of us who, from some deficiency in education or reasoning power, are unable to realize for ourselves the goodness of God, and such of us generally look to the parson for guidance, and take what he says for gospel.

But let us hope that all in Copse Hill—the church-goers at least—paid their way and were prosperous, and went home to their Sunday dinner with the comfortable feeling that they were the sheep of the parish, and that they could look with scorn and pity on their neighbours the goats.

This division of the people led in time to a general appearance of priggishness and straitlacedness in the village. The good people looked so very good, and began to what is vulgarly termed “cut” the bad

people. Instead of the friendly greetings which passed formerly between neighbours, there were stiff nods, or no greeting at all. People who had given the time of day to each other and talked learnedly on the weather for a dozen or two of years, now passed with a nod and grunt, or perhaps with no mark of recognition. There was a general cautiousness. People looked at each other with an expression that meant, "I wonder whether you owe anyone anything; because, if you do, I shall have nothing to say to you."

Miss Tattleton and Mr. Biggins were great favourites with the vicar, so it is to be presumed that they were very prosperous in business, and owed no man anything. 'Tis true that Biggins did not carry out the vicar's other commandment, for he had never entered a church for very many years. Miss Tattleton went more regularly than she

had been accustomed to do in Mr. Bonfellow's time, and even sacrificed some time from her business on saints' days, and in Lent, that she might please Mr. Voyd. Some of Mr. Voyd's enemies (and the best of men have enemies) declared that he was friendly with the occupants of the inn and the shop because he made them instruments for picking up gossip ; but if there were any truth in it, Mr. Voyd did it with good intentions, for he thought this justifiable to find out the faults of his parishioners, in order to be better able to correct them.

This method of managing a parish has its disadvantages. A parson has great power. He is the dispenser of the parish charities and alms and Christmas gifts. Those who want help must take care to keep friendly with him. If he is fond of gossip, plenty will be found for him, and if he is known to dislike certain people, he can hear

those people abused to his heart's content.

Most parsons have some women helpers in the parish—women who either have not or cannot find interest in their own homes. Women of this sort are sometimes of immense use, and sometimes do infinite harm. We have known such who have made their own homes one continual scene of discord through their ill-temper, and yet in parish work have been most useful and energetic. Their energy, which is spent in ill-temper at home, is directed into a useful channel in the parish.

Mr. Voyd was not without helpers. One lady had devoted many years of her life to the parish work in Copse Hill. She had been looked upon as an honourable and good woman, who worked in singleness of heart, and scorned meanness and gossip. But the casuistry of the Rev. Vypar Voyd seemed to change her completely. Her

duty to the vicar soon became her sole aim, and to further his views she spent a considerable time in gossip at the village shop and elsewhere. She even condescended to question people's servants, when information was wanted. No doubt she argued with herself that she could not be doing wrong, because she was only carrying out the vicar's work; but, unfortunately, gossip is a pastime that grows upon one, and she soon came to love it for its own sake. What she heard in cottages and at the village shop she carried, with a few additions and embellishments, into the drawing-rooms, and created a love of scandal where perhaps it had not previously existed. So in time there was quite a gossip fever in the place—an endemic of gossip—and all through the little mistake of a very well-intentioned young man.

Another little mistake which the vicar

made—and it was made quite unconsciously—was dividing the people too distinctly into upper and lower classes. There may be some fairness in separating the good from the bad: for the bad have a chance of becoming good if they like, but the lower classes have little chance of becoming the upper classes. Now, the Reverend Vypar Voyd, so far from doing this intentionally, prided himself on his affability to what he termed the lower classes. He put on his blindest manner in speaking to them; but the very fact of his putting on a manner showed he made the distinction. He did not talk to them naturally. They felt this, and it helped to make a wider gap between them and their richer neighbours. This increased the general feeling of distrust which the division into good and bad people had made.

With the upper classes, as Mr. Voyd

termed them, he was not so successful as he could have wished. There was certainly a good deal of room for reform amongst some of them, but he made no signs of undertaking it. Perhaps he saw no fault in them, as, being rich, they could pay their way, and most of them attended church regularly.

Squire Perivale, for instance, was in the vicar's eyes a good man—a very good man, the vicar would say. He attended church regularly, and looked most venerable and pious. He listened attentively to every part of the service. He gave liberally to the various parish subscriptions. He lived in a beautiful house, magnificently furnished. He had many conservatories, wherein he grew the choicest fruits and flowers. He gave periodical dinner-parties, where everything but the wit was of first-rate quality. He occupied a respectable position in society, being a director on several boards, or

what is commonly called a "guinea-pig." This man has not a fault, the world and the Reverend Vypar Voyd will say.

He and his wife have a beautiful big house containing many rooms, and surrounded by many acres of pleasure-ground, all for their own enjoyment, with notice to trespassers at every corner ; whereas opposite his gates there are cottages belonging to him in the most wretched condition, in some of which families are so crowded together that several people must sleep in one very small room. But this troubles not the good man's peace of mind. The cottages are not a paying property, and he cannot be expected to give up any of his luxurious surroundings to better the condition of his tenants. So he drives through his gates in a comfortable carriage, behind valuable horses, regardless of the state of the cottages and their occupants on the other side of the road.

What is it to him if the overcrowding of human beings in a cottage is destructive of decency and morality? But he may be said to be not altogether regardless of the state of his tenants, for he once turned out a family because the father was committed to gaol for stealing a piece of bacon. Of course this was only right, though the family would have to live on somebody's land, if not on Mr. Perivale's; but there are tiresome people, with a stern idea of justice, who would say that it is a far greater crime in a rich man to neglect the condition of the people on his estate than it is for a poor man to steal a bit of bacon. Holders of land are simply stewards of the land they hold, and are responsible for the condition of those living on it. The land belongs to the people.

But leaving the cottages out of the question, as Mr. Perivale himself did, he was a

good man. He was a shining light in Mr. Voyd's flock. In his overpowering sense of goodness, he might perhaps be too apt to look with scorn on some of the bad people — on that scapegoat Frowde, for instance, when he appeared in a brown-holland coat, or, what was worse, in his shirt-sleeves: a shade of horror would then pass over the good man's face, and a shrug would be seen in the broadcloth-covered shoulders. 'Tis not every *gentlemanly* fellow that can afford to be seen in blouse or shirt-sleeves, but every *manly* fellow can.

Notwithstanding the great reformation in the village, there was a general regret for and looking back to the time when Mr. Bonfellow was vicar. There had been plenty of fault found with him in the old days, but somehow everyone seemed to have forgotten the faults and remembered the virtues. Expressions of regret and praise were con-

tinually used concerning him, both by "upper classes" and "lower classes," and by "sheep" and "goats." It was the one subject on which there was no division in the parish.

"What a dear good man he was," said one.

"What a gentleman," said another.

"He was kind to everyone alike," said a third; and Miss Tattleton was heard to say, "I saw that dear old Dick when I was out in the cart to-day with the bread; and if there hadn't been a hedge between us, I think I must have jumped down and hugged him, I was so glad to see him." As "dear old Dick" quite understood the character of Miss Tattleton, he would not have been offended if he had heard this remark. Perhaps the secret of Mr. Bonfellow's popularity was that he was so *human*. He did not raise himself on a lofty pedestal, and then

denounce everyone below him. Indeed, he thought too little of himself. He was too tender-hearted to take the very severe view of religion, and threaten all sorts of horrible punishments. Tender-hearted people are generally brave and true, and Mr. Bonfellow was a brave and true man. No doubt we were very bad people in Mr. Bonfellow's time, or there would not have been so much room for improvement by Mr. Voyd; but if we were bad we did not know it. We never pointed at one another and looked at each other with distrust, as we do now; for somehow, Mr. Bonfellow brought out the best side of all of us, and made us think well of ourselves and our neighbours too. Then there was Mrs. Bonfellow—a kind, sensible, useful little lady, with the pleasantest face; and a flock of little Bonfellows, who, with their nursemaids, pervaded the village, and were

welcomed by everyone. When they all disappeared it seemed as if the poetry of the place had departed. Mr. Bonfellow, however, had not gone very far away.

Kate Temple was one day riding out with her father when she met Mr. and Mrs. Frowde just by Mr. Bonfellow's house. The conversation fell on Mr. Bonfellow's goodness, a favourite subject with the Frowdes.

Mrs. Frowde was describing the happy state of things in Copse Hill, when he was vicar. "We are all being divided into good and bad people now," said Mrs. Frowde, "and Manly and I belong to the bad, Kate. I hope you won't think it necessary to 'cut' us."

"Yes," said Manly Frowde, "several people have cut me already, and they look quite angry when we pass because their

dogs won't cut ours. It is very undiscerning of a good man's dog not to know when he meets a bad man's dog. You'll be cutting me soon, Temple, for you are sure to be classed with the good people, as you are rich."

"I am afraid it may be rather the other way; for I don't think our good vicar quite liked my treatment of him when he called. I found him too inquisitive to please me. However, he will have no chance just now of placing me either amongst good or bad; for we are going away for about a month to Windermere."

At this moment Mr. Bonfellow came out of his gate, and was introduced to Mr. Temple and Kate—with some difficulty, for he was carrying a large churchwarden's book, a small club book, and an umbrella, all in one hand, the other hand being

entirely devoted to a basket of good things for an invalid, which he had been instructed by good Mrs. Bonfellow to carry most carefully.

“What a gentleman he is!” said Kate, when Mr. Bonfellow had gone on ; and they stood watching him. They saw a cart coming in the distance, being driven very fast, and occupied by three men from Copse Hill. The cart was pulled up suddenly as it drew near Mr. Bonfellow, and all the men lifted their hats with an expression of respect.

“There !” said Mrs. Frowde : “ can’t you see how those men worship Mr. Bonfellow ? Why, the man who has the reins is the fastest driver in these parts, and never stops for anyone : he is one of what Mr. Voyd would call the bad people amongst us, and never goes to church. Our present vicar,

with all his saintliness, will never command such respect as that."

"Thou shalt not speak evil of dignitaries," said Mr. Frowde.

CHAPTER XIII.

SCANDALUM MAGNATUM.

RAFAEL :

An oily plausible fellow came, Astrologos,
Up the back stairs by stealth to see me yesterday :
Aldeborontiphosciphornio brought him here—
The many-syllabled lordling.

ASTROLOGOS :

And his business, Prince ?

RAFAEL :

To vilify you. To hint that he had heard that you
Had done or said or thought things vile and treasonable,
That your proceedings were by no means orthodox,
That there were rumours all through Megalopolis
Of your most foul disloyalty and heresy.

ASTROLOGOS :

Impalpable dust of slander fills the atmosphere,
And blinds the eyes and warps the husky throats of
men :

But, when truth's sunshaft smite the air, at once you
see

The small foul atoms of the dirt we tread upon.

The Comedy of Dreams.

TO Ashton Minima one morning there came a note from Dr. Sutton, telling his friend Marston Sebright that for health's sake he was about to leave town for awhile, and to stay at a small place which he had on the banks of the Dart, not very far from Ashburton.

"I shall be delighted to take your son with me, my dear Sebright," went on the doctor. "It is a solitary place, you know ; but the air is lovely, and the scenery without anything to equal it that I have ever seen. I daresay he will work even harder at Holme Cottage than in London, and I know how eager you are that he should lose no time. If you agree in my plan, write to him at once, as I am ordered to

leave as soon as possible, and Mrs. Sebright would doubtless wish him to be at home for a few days."

Strange to say, Mrs. Sebright did not seem to wish it. She was delighted at the idea of his going into Devonshire, since it would remove him farther from the evil influence which attracted him to Copse Hill—a hill which, if the worthy old lady had known the legend of Tannhäuser, she would have thought was the fateful Venusberg removed to England. But, though she pined for a sight of her son's frank face and active figure, she was willing to sacrifice the delight of seeing him lest he should also see those dreadful Frowdes and Temples of whom the wise and thoughtful Vicar of Copse Hill had warned her. She could hardly oppose Jack's coming home in definite terms; but she puzzled Marston Sebright by such sayings as that it did not

seem necessary, it might unsettle him, and other discouraging phrases.

Jack's father, however, did not see it all in that light. He wanted to know how hermeneutics agreed with Jack. He accordingly made light of Mrs. Sebright's objections, which were rather hinted than outspoken, and wrote to Sutton approving the arrangement, and to his son, fixing an early day for his coming home.

Jack was in ecstasy. He rejoiced at the notion of going into Devonshire, a country quite unknown to him : for the strong spirit of man, in its restless and fearless youth, longs always for the unknown. True, it was farther from what was to him the centre of the world, the quiet village where his lady-love abode : but railways have abolished distance, and the additional two hundred miles were only four or five hours by express. And then he should have an

unexpected meeting with Kate ! Delirious thought ! He would not let Mrs. Frowde know he was coming. He would ride Bessie over, and take his kind friends by surprise. He pictured to himself a lithe little figure tripping through the wicket gate under the heavy lime boughs, and bright eyes brightening, and pure cheeks sweetly flushing, when he was seen upon the lawn. He went and talked to the raven about it, for Jack *must* talk, even if only to himself.

“Peter, old boy, I am going to leave you. I shan’t hear any more of your croaks for a long time, you old philosopher.”

“Croak !” quoth Peter, with one eye on Jack and another on a pert cock-sparrow that he rather thought he should like for lunch. He had left a bit of his raw meat at an easy distance, just to tempt that sparrow.

“I’m going to see my sweetheart, Peter,” said Jack, sitting on a log in the sunshine. “My sweetheart! My sweetheart!” He murmured the fond words rhythmically, and wished himself a poet. “Had you ever a sweetheart, Peter, when you were a young bird up in the Cumberland Hills—about the time of Henry VIII, I suppose? Now, had you ever a sweetheart, Peter?”

“Croak! *Croak!* CROAK!” quoth Peter jubilantly.

A good omen for Jack, you will say: but the fact is Peter had caught that pert cock-sparrow, whose impudent chirping had a long time annoyed him, while his plumpness (caused by his stealing Peter’s scraps) was very tempting. Peter’s last croak was almost a scream.

“You old wretch!” said Jack. “It would serve you right if I took that sparrow away from you. You’ve got no sympathy. Come

now, Peter, aren't you glad that I'm going to see my sweetheart?"

"Cro-o-o-o-ak!" said the raven, in so hopelessly depressing a way, that Jack arose and fled, thinking it was an evil omen—Macbeth says,

"The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements."

But the prolonged and dismal croak which had appalled Jack Sebright was actually caused by Peter's having swallowed his sparrow so greedily that several bones stuck in his gullet.

Jack came home, and was received right royally, having the happy yet dangerous privilege of an only son. His parents thought he looked none the worse for theologic study in London. Mrs. Sebright was delighted to see that hermeneutics had not quelled her boy's Homeric appetite. The

sirloin diminished before him ; the healthy tankard pleased him more than wine. Marston Sebright had made up his mind to ask him a few questions as to his progress under Sutton—but not till the youngster had enjoyed a few days at home.

“You’ll like to ride over and see your friends at Copse Hill, I suppose, Jack?” said Mr. Sebright. “I rather like your having taken a fancy to Frowde: knowing men a little out of the common is a good thing for a clergyman, who for the most part has to deal with people as like one another as a flock of sheep. Why not ride over to-morrow? Bessie will be delighted.”

“And not only Bessie,” thought Jack.

“Not to-morrow,” said Mrs. Sebright. “Knowing how fond you are of him, I have asked Mr. Voyd to come over to luncheon. So you must please postpone your visit to Mr. Frowde till the next day.”

Mrs. Sebright laid a curious stress on the words *Mr. Frowde*, which simple-hearted Jack did not notice. He could not say to his mother, "Voyd be hanged!" The most innocent deception meets its punishment: he had used the vicar's name as an excuse for his frequent visits to Copse Hill, and now he was kept away a whole day from his Kate as a consequence of that harmless fraud. It was hard upon Jack, who could only acquiesce in silence.

"It is unlucky," said Marston Sebright, who had been puzzling himself as to how there could be any special liking between Mr. Voyd and his son, "that I cannot possibly be at home to meet your friend to-morrow. Perhaps you will enjoy his company all the more."

Jack's countenance did not at that moment indicate intense enjoyment. Mrs. Sebright

was, however, well pleased with the state of affairs.

Breakfast next morning was rather dull. Jack's appetite was not so good as usual, a fact on which his mother had no heart to comment. The Rev. Marston Sebright had always so much on hand when the post came in that he was in the habit of breakfasting mechanically. That meal was always the same with him, summer and winter. One cup of tea from the Himalaya, one new-laid egg, one slice of dry toast, was his regular allowance. There was no affectation of abstemiousness and regularity about Marston Sebright; he was a man of native moderation, and disliked excess of all kinds. As a Churchman, Coplestone himself could not have classified him: he was neither High nor Low nor Broad—had nothing in common with either Pusey or Close or Stanley.

He was an English Churchman—neither more no less. At this present time he had been rather amused, and perhaps a little irritated by a clerical mania for teetotalism, which had infected the neighbourhood. Being asked by a zealous curate to aid in the movement, he distinctly declined.

“Total abstinence is excess,” he replied. “If it were necessary to temperance, yet remember that there are many things besides temperance which a minister of Christ should teach, and that by concentrating your efforts in one direction only you must leave the greater part of your duty unperformed. Be guided by the glorious catena of Saint Peter: ‘Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness charity.’”

He gave the quotation in the original

Greek, with too much rapidity for that zealous curate to follow him; and when the young priest was gone Marston Sebright said to himself:

“The apostle puts knowledge before temperance. These men are intemperate because they despise knowledge.”

The digression may be excused as showing the character of our hero's father—a man by no means ideally perfect, but with strong yearnings for a perfection based on his own ideal. Let us leave him for the present getting into his dog-cart, in which he drove a bay mare that trotted an easy fourteen miles without breaking, and saying goodbye to Jack with a hope that he and his friend would enjoy themselves together.

Poor Jack! He had Bessie out, told his mother he should be home in good time for lunch, and rode off across wild common land, trying to blow away the unpleasant feel-

ings that had come over him. It was not only that he was kept back for a day from seeing Kate : he had a kind of vague presentiment that there was something unpleasant in front of him. How disgusted he was that he had ever mentioned Voyd to his mother, or asked Voyd to call at Ashton Minima ! Not that he disliked the vicar ! he thought him one of the most admirable of clergymen ; in all sincerity he hoped that he might do his duty half as well. Still there was not much in common between them ; and he knew that there was a dreary afternoon before him. However, a brisk ride shook him into healthier form. Bessie was wild to feel her young master's nervous thighs upon her sides once more, and skimmed the hedges like a roe ; and he shouted as he rode homeward,

“Never mind, Bessie, my pet ! To-morrow

we'll ride another way, and have a merry time."

He was only a quarter of an hour late, whereas the vicar had been more than that before his time, and had confidentially conversed with Mrs. Sebright. Jack, having recovered his spirits, received Mr. Voyd with frank cordiality, and luncheon went off quietly enough. Jack talked only of general subjects, and said nothing of his friends at Copse Hill. The vicar hardly knew how to begin : indeed, he hesitated so long that Mrs. Sebright lost patience, and came to his aid.

"Jack," said the old lady, "Mr. Voyd does not give me a very good account of some of the acquaintances you seem to have made at Copse Hill, about whom you have said little or nothing to me. As a future clergyman you must be careful. It is most

fortunate you did not ride over to-day."

"What does this mean?" said Jack, looking straight at Voyd, who did not look straight at him.

"I have been merely telling Mrs. Sebright," said the vicar, in a saintly voice, "that not only is Mr. Frowde an infidel, but that there are stains—yes, sad stains,—upon his moral character, which render it inexpedient—more than inexpedient—that anyone who desires to be unspotted from the world should visit him."

Jack was astounded by this sudden and savage attack. He grasped his tankard, and took a great gulp before he spoke. Then he said, trying to be calm,

"Tell me, Voyd, what is there against Frowde, and on whose authority you speak?"

"It would ill become a clergyman to indicate the sins, however glaring, of his par-

ishioners : nor would it be right to mention the names of the excellent persons—excellent and most reliable—from whom he obtains information. It is the duty, the bounden duty, of a priest to warn, but never to circulate scandal. I cannot, therefore, my dear Sebright, do more than assure you that Mr. and Mrs. Frowde—fascinating, intensely fascinating, as I hear their society is—are entirely unfit to be your associates.”

“I don’t at all understand this,” said Jack Sebright, angrily. “If it is part of a clergyman’s duty to take away a man’s character without giving a reason for it, I’ll never take holy orders—unholy orders I should rather call them.”

He rose from his chair, looking like a roused lion. He felt there was something false in all this. His fierce look frightened his mother, who thought she would settle the affair at once, and said,

“Be calm, dear Jack; do be calm. Mr. Voyd tells you this with the kindest of motives. He has something to say to you also of a family you never mentioned to me—for good reason, I fear”—she said, with a sigh—“the Temples.”

A shudder of rage ran through Jack's form. He could have strangled the vicar, who looked at him from the opposite side of the table with a pitying smile that revealed a row of white aggressive teeth.

“Well, Voyd?” said Jack. He had no breath for more.

“I regret to say,” returned the vicar, in a low voice, “that Mr. and Mrs. Temple are living together in defiance of the Seventh Commandment.”

“Is there anything more?” asked Jack Sebright.

Neither his mother nor the vicar spoke. Jack had grown curiously calm.

“Good-bye, Voyd,” he said; “I must think over what I have heard. To-morrow I shall ride over to Copse Hill and inquire for myself.”

He left them together, and went off into a solitary place in the moorland—his favourite haunt beneath the whispering birch where he had dreamt of love—and tried to think clearly. He could not. The anger he had felt at finding his friends—ay, and the parents of the girl he loved—so foully aspersed, had set his brain in a whirl. He cooled his heated forehead with the water of the little brooklet. He stretched himself on the grass, as if seeking solace—another Antaeus—from the touch of Mother Earth, and gazed upon the few flecks of white cloud that floated in a pale-blue sky. How long he lay, in a formless reverie, he knew not; but at last his brain received a sudden impulse. A robin perch-

ed on the spray above him, and showered forth such rapid rush of silver song that it awoke him to life and resolve. He looked up: there was the merry red-breasted atom distending its tawny throat, and filling the air with music. Jack sprang to his feet.

“Thanks, brave birdie!” he cried. “You’ve preached me a sermon, and the text is *Never Despair*.”

When Jack returned to the house, he found that the Rev. Vypar Voyd had gone, and his father had not yet returned. His mother was watching anxiously for him, hoping to have a chance of speaking to him before his father came in.

“Jack, dear!” she said, as he came in, “I am afraid you are very much upset. You must know that I love you too much to vex you in any way. I could do anything in the world for you, Jack. I am only anxious for your happiness. Don’t you

believe in me, Jack? What else have I in the world to care for?"

"Mother, dear, I know you love me, and are anxious about me; but you must let me judge for myself sometimes. I am no longer a baby: I am old enough to see between right and wrong. I must at some time or other begin to act for myself, without being interfered with."

"You know I never have interfered with you, Jack. But on this occasion I am afraid you have been very much taken in with fascinating bad people. And oh! my dear boy, do consider the disgrace you will bring on your father and me if you should ever get mixed up with such people. Promise me one thing, Jack—that you will not go over to Copse Hill till you have looked at the matter more thoughtfully."

"I can't promise any such thing, mother. The character of my friend Frowde has

been attacked, and I should be a coward if I did not tell him what I have heard."

"Will you promise me, then, that you will call on your friend Mr. Voyd first? Perhaps if you see him alone he will be able to tell you more on the subject and talk more earnestly."

"No, mother, I can't promise; for I don't believe in him."

"Jack, dear, you don't know what an earnest, self-sacrificing man he is; he is a very saint."

"A great deal too saintly for me."

"You would never have talked like that, Jack, before you knew those Frowdes."

"My dear mother, don't be so reproachful. You are exaggerating these things in your own mind; Mr. Voyd has had some strange effect on you. If Frowde is ever so bad, it can't hurt me to go over and hear what he has to say for himself. Every man

ought to have a chance of justifying himself, if he will condescend to do it ; but Frowde isn't the sort of man that would. So for once I must disregard your wishes, mother."

CHAPTER XIV.

“CAN SUCH THINGS BE?”

Few dare, in this most slanderous world, defy
That demon-despot, the Ubiquitous Lie :
But whoso dares, in the first fire of youth,
Shall know Heaven's purest daughter, virgin Truth.

JACK SEBRIGHT rode away from home sorrowfully next morning. Seldom had he refused any request of his mother's, and he felt it hard that his first refusal should be connected with his young and happy, though unacknowledged love. Mrs. Sebright looked at him pathetically at breakfast, and said no word. As to his father, immersed as usual in his letters and

papers and books, he just looked up as Jack rose to go, and said :

“Don’t hurry home, my boy. Tell your friend Frowde I was delighted with that letter of his in the *Times* about wild birds.”

How Mrs. Sebright longed for courage enough to tell her husband what a wicked man Mr. Frowde was ! But then it suddenly occurred to her she had agreed with the vicar that nothing should be said to Mr. Sebright ; and then, even more suddenly, her conscience smote her, and she felt that she had been wrong to make any agreement of the kind. Marston Sebright had a right to know every thought of her heart—had a paramount and incontestable right, where the welfare of their only child was concerned. She left the room rather hurriedly, and went away to think the matter out.

Not so fast as usual did Jack put Bessie along the well-accustomed road to Copse

Hill, though he saw in a vision Kate Temple's bonny face at the end of his ride. Yesterday he had been indignant: to-day he was despondent. It was Jack's first encounter with "that demon-despot, the Ubiquitous Lie." That dominator of the sordid world is usually kicked out of our public schools, nor is he very popular at the universities; but, once you are beyond the happy regions of youth, he meets you at all hands. He speaks in the House, edits newspapers, charms you with his gossip in the club smoking-room, enlightens you as to the foibles of Mayfair matronhood and maidenhood. Jack Sebright had never been face to face with him before. It was a new and by no means pleasant sensation. Jack Sebright had never traversed the pleasant winding lanes from Ashton Minima to Copse Hill with so little elation of spirit or enjoyment of existence.

However, he reached the cheery green gate at last; and there was Frowde leaning over it, *Times* in hand, looking for subjects.

"My dear Sebright," he exclaimed, "this is a treat. So you have a holiday from your theology? I hope it is a long one. Come in, old fellow, Bessie knows her way to the stable. Of course you'll stay to dinner. The missus will be delighted to see you."

Jack, with his head full of the vicar's information, did not respond as frankly as usual. Frowde noticed it.

"Theology is boring you, Sebright, I should say. You're not your old jolly self. You must let dogma go to the dogs to-day, and enjoy the lovely summer afternoon."

"I wish I could," said Jack, in a tone so forlorn that Frowde could not help laughing at him. "I've so much to say to you,"

he went on, "and 'pon honour, I don't know where to begin."

"Don't begin," quoth Frowde, "at any rate not yet. A good Samaritan of my acquaintance has sent me some lobsters and Devonshire cream, and we are just going to combine them in a mayonnaise."

Frowde saw by Jack's rueful countenance that there was something on his mind, and he foresaw that the boy's countenance would not become less rueful when he heard of Kate Temple's absence; so he determined to cheer him with a gay meal and some merry nonsense before they could come to grave discourse. In this, as in all other things, Mrs. Frowde was his apt and ready ally.

A man must be inter-penetrated with dullness, and depression like a sponge with water, to resist the infectious gaiety of pleasant unaffected folk like Jack's friends. They were

people who took seriously enough the serious side of life, but who were not so drearily stupid as to neglect its humorous side. It was their belief that difficulties were made to be overcome, and that the contest against them should be resolute, yet mirthful; and without that belief the condition of a man of letters in England must be a melancholy failure. For, while England enjoys some of the highest culture in the world, in no country are so few books bought in proportion to material wealth; in no country are the servants of literature less honoured—unless indeed they are opulent amateurs, or happen to become the fashion. Men hear Mr. Ruskin prophesying in the wilderness and maintaining that it is a fraud to read a book unless you buy it; then, with a smile at such impracticable opinions, they send to Mudie's for their light reading. Artists flourish: for your wife's portrait by

Millais, or a rood of canvas covered with quasi-Greek figures by Leighton or Poynter, is a clear sign that you possess the chief of modern virtues—an ample balance at your bankers. But “writing fellows,” as the leading literary journal of London calls those without whom it could not exist, require indomitable courage to make their way against the close-packed phalanx of astute publishers and malignant critics, and abundant humour to cheer their “uneasy steps over the burning waste.”

It having been agreed that cream of Devon turned that king of insects, the lobster, into a perfect mayonnaise, and that Sauterne went excellent well therewith, Frowde got his young friend out on the lawn, and, as they paced up and down beneath the million-blossomed limes, listened to his story. Jack, who had been despondent before he faced his friend, had now

become indignant again: his occasional bursts of eloquence were startling, and we fear he occasionally applied stronger epithets than were desirable to that ingenious and well-meaning young priest, the Rev. Vypar Voyd. He told Frowde all that he had heard, both as to himself and the Temples, and wound up by saying:

“What is a fellow to do? I am bound to believe that a clergyman would not speak in this way unless he had good reason. I could not get him to say anything clear about you, but you hear what he says of the Temples.”

“I hear; and I maintain it to be false. If the man were not an utter ignoramus, he would know who Mr. Temple is, and be thankful for so distinguished a parishioner. His vision is so circumscribed by this small parish that he can see nothing of the world’s wide arena. He is like a gander in a pond,

admired by its attendant geese and goslings : if an eagle from the cliffs above, with the light in his eye of the sun he has just soared to survey, or a peregrine falcon fresh from leagues of sea, should rest on a tree close by, Anserculus stretches his long neck, and gives a fiery and vindictive hiss. Luckily, neither eagle nor falcon cares for such a pitiful quarry."

Jack laughed cheerily.

"The picture is very like," he said. "But how dare any man—and most of all a clergyman—make a false statement so audaciously?"

"The mania for gossip is a disease, like a dog's hunger for something putrescent. Leave this accusation against the Temples untouched : if the vicar should persist in it, he will probably receive a sharp lesson, that will teach him caution, if not charity. Charity, I fear, he cannot learn. And now

as to myself. He simply says that I am one of the wicked. From his point of view I am. His religion is formal, while mine is spiritual. Instead of listening to his sermons on Sunday, I am sometimes compelled to write a political sermon for a morning paper, which cannot appear on Monday without leading articles. Strangely enough, many more things happen on Sundays than other days. Waterloo is one of many battles won and lost on the day dedicated to the Prince of Peace. I wish I had a record of the many times that a telegram has reached me on a Sunday, telling of some unexpected event, and demanding immediate comment thereon. Perhaps the leader sometimes did as much good as the sermon."

"Very likely," said Jack, rather absently, for, as they paced the turf, he was listening for the familiar click of the wicket-gate, which often opened for Kate Temple, trip-

ping featly along the shadowy path. In his heart he was longing to exclaim—

“Here comes the lady. Oh, so light a foot
Will ne’er wear out the everlasting flint.”

But she came not, and Frowde proceeded.

“You see, Jack, Voyd makes no definite charge. He talks to your mother, amiably anxious to preserve you from contamination ; and thereby prevents my making any fuss, if it were worth while, because it would annoy Mrs. Sebright. Further, he declines to give up his authority. No gentleman would say a word against another man without being ready with proof ; but a clergyman can do that to which a gentleman will not condescend. If he dare say anything distinctly libellous my solicitor shall take him in hand and compel an abject apology.”

“I am so afraid he will make mischief,” said Jack, despondently.

“He will try,” replied Frowde, laughing. “The adroit way in which he has attacked your mother is very fine. Let him alone, I advise. If, however, his scandals make Mrs. Sebright uncomfortable, tell the story to your father at once.”

“Do you think so?”

“Certainly. He is a man of the world. He knows who Temple is, if Voyd does not. He knows me well enough to be sure that I am not a monster of wickedness. Speak freely to him.”

Just then Mrs. Frowde joined them, and Jack forgot all about Voyd when he heard that Kate Temple would not that day come through the wicket gate.

“My luck!” he said. “She at Windermere, and I close to Dartmoor! Five hundred miles asunder, if it is an inch!”

CHAPTER XV.

A WOMAN'S WAY.

When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou !

“**N**OW, Mr. Ralph, do cheer up a bit, and come and sit down and have this nice bit of steak and onions I’ve got ready for your supper. I’ve taken extra pains with it, and have sent Jane off to bed, because I thought you’d like to be quiet ; and here’s the kettle just on the boil in case you finish up with a drop of something hot. Lor, Mr. Ralph ! it makes me feel quite lonesome like to see you so down—you as used to be so particular in everything, and

now hardly knows what you eats. Why, there's no pleasure in cooking for anyone as don't enjoy their food. One would think now, Mr. Ralph, that it was yourself was crossed in love, instead of the master."

"There you are again, Mary, with your nonsense about love ; you ought to know better, a sensible woman like you. If women would only attend to their own business and leave the men alone, everything would go right. I haven't felt well for some time, my girl, but I am better now," he said, drawing his chair up to the table, for the smell of the steak and onions was irresistible, and quite overcame Ralph's low spirits.

"And have the master settled when he goes a-shooting, Mr. Ralph? Because I should like a few days' holiday before he goes, if I am to be left here all the time you are away."

"Now, what can you want a holiday for, Mary? You've got 'all you want here."

"Have I?" said Mary; "that's all you know about it. Not a gown shall I have to my back, or a shoe to my foot, if I can't get a day or two for shopping."

"Ah, that's all you women think of—fine clothes and nonsense about sweethearts; but there, you always look very well, Mary," he said, looking up at her.

Mary looked pleased.

"The fact of the matter is," Ralph went on, "the master ain't going to the Earl's at all this year. I can't think what things are coming to. Master informed me to-day that he intends going away for about a month only, and he'll go very shortly."

"Well, when is there a chance for me, Mr. Ralph?"

"We can't spare you yet, Mary."

Ralph had for some time been unconsciously consoled by Mary.

Mary had a comfortable philosophic way of looking at things, and she knew all Ralph's moods better than he knew them himself. She knew when to speak and when to be silent. She always kept up the same respectful manner to Ralph, and never allowed him to suppose that she managed him. But she did manage him, undoubtedly. She had come to do it gradually, and now the silent Ralph had for some time confided his troubles concerning his master to her. Not that he did it confidentially, but patronizingly. Mary never appeared too eager to hear what Ralph had to say, but always managed to lead him on quietly till he had relieved his mind. She saw that he was unusually vexed to-night, and she endeavoured to make him unusually comfortable.

“And here’s just the nicest little tart for you,” she said, bringing out from the oven a delicate-looking little pie. “The crust’s as light as a feather, and can’t hurt you.”

“Your crusts are generally good, Mary.” He might have said *always* with some truth, but this would have been, in Ralph’s opinion, too much praise for a woman.

“And so the master ain’t going a-shooting, after all?” said Mary.

“No, I wish he was; it would do him good.”

Ralph said nothing more till he had finished the tart, and pushed away his plate, and sat back in his chair, when he remarked,

“He’s going to an outlandish place up in the North.”

“Indeed !” said Mary.

“Yes, and that isn’t the worst of it.”

“Ain’t it, now?” remarked Mary sympathetically.

“I was just passing the time of evening to Clope, the coachman, and thought I'd stop for a word or two with him, when he told me his family have gone to the very same place.”

“Well, now, that's very odd. And I suppose you go of course, Mr. Ralph?”

“That's just what I said to the master, but he said it seemed scarcely worth while for so short a time. Mary, my girl, I left so cut up. I never was so cut up. This is the first time the master has wanted me out of the way.”

“There, now; just try a glass hot and strong, with a good squeeze of lemon, and I'll join you with just the least little drop for company. It's no good to grieve, Mr. Ralph.”

“But what do you make of this, Mary?”

“Well, Mr. Ralph, I should say there was more in it than we knows on.”

“But you can see master isn’t in love with the young lady.”

“No ; but is it the other one ?”

“It can’t be : she’s married.”

“Married or not, I should say that’s the one.”

“But master and Mr. Temple are such good friends !”

“That may be ; but are you sure she’s Mrs. Temple ?”

“They say she is, and the young lady speaks of her as her mother.”

“Well, Mr. Ralph, as I said before, there’s more than we guesses ; but, mark my words, that’s the one.”

Two days after this conversation Mr. Forncett departed for Windermere, leaving Ralph to be consoled by Mary. And he was to some extent consoled, but he was not happy about his master. He had hitherto

supposed that he was entirely in his master's confidence, and he now began to suspect that not only had his master a secret from him, but that he had possessed that secret for many years.

He brooded over it for some days before mentioning it to Mary; for he felt that although Mary was good enough in her way—for a woman—yet anything so sacred as the feeling that existed between his master and him should not be discussed with her. But Mary managed Ralph so well that somehow he found himself one evening pouring out his heart to her, and wondering why the master had kept a secret from him all these years.

“Well, Mr. Ralph,” said Mary, “you know when there's a woman in the case the gentlemen don't always speak. I daresay, Mr. Ralph, if the truth was known, maybe

you've had your own disappointment in your time."

"Perhaps I have, my girl."

"That's just it, Mr. Ralph. These bits of hussies break a good man's heart, and are like to be sorry enough for it in time to come, when they can't put things right again."

Before the evening finished, Mary had extracted from Ralph the romance of his youth.

"Well, as I says, here's two good lives spoilt by them bits of girls; for no doubt the lady over the way was the one as done it for master. Not as I mean to say the men are bound to look to the women for happiness, not at all: but it do look cheerful-like to see a man with a good wife and a nice family round him, and I am sure you and master would have made the best of husbands. But there! it is no good grieving; it can't

be helped now." Which speech of Mary's made Ralph wonder when he went to bed whether it couldn't be helped after all—if the master didn't object.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MEETING.

A woman who is light from heart to eye,
 A woman who is love from eye to heart;
 That is true beauty. Ah, on life's rough chart
 Mark down the place of meeting ere you die,
 If you have met such woman. Never sigh
 If she desire you to dwell far apart:
 Just to have made a vein of anger start
 In her strong soul is something. Ah, but why
 Is it that such a woman seldom sees
 The man of calm imaginative brain,
 The man who loves the birds and flowers and trees,
 Who fathoms pleasure and finds power in pain?
 One glance, one grasp, would make one flesh of these,
 Yet go they wandering round the world in vain.

ON a bright autumn morning Mr. Temple
 and his daughter are wandering on
 the margin of Windermere. Both look

very thoughtful. Temple is pondering on a difficult subject in connection with Leonora, and Kate is thinking over a letter she has received from Mrs. Frowde. She is picturing Jack's disappointment at not finding her at Copse Hill, and is wondering whenever she shall see him again, now that he is such a long way off. But her face brightens up a bit as she determines to let Mrs. Frowde into her secret, and send a little note through her to Jack. Then she wonders what Mrs. Frowde means in her letter by saying that the mischief-making in the village is becoming serious, but she says to herself that nobody can make mischief about her and Jack, as they don't know her secret. So she trips along by the side of her father, wondering what she shall say in her little letter to Jack.

Meantime, Leonora is sitting by the window in the hotel, enjoying the morning air,

which blows freshly over the lake. She is longing for, and yet dreading, a meeting which she knows must presently take place.

Suddenly a visitor is announced. Leonora moves forward to meet him.

“Leonora!”

“Frank!”

And a tight grasp of hands and the meeting of eyes spoke the love which should have been acknowledged sixteen years ago.

“Will you sit down, Fr—Mr. Forncett?” said Leonora, trying to speak in her ordinary way.

“There is no need for ceremony now, Leonora—at least, not at this meeting. Whether we are to be friends in future, or to separate for ever, let us realise for these few moments the love we have so long cherished. Tell me, Leonora, why did you marry that man?”

“I was young and silly, Frank, and dis-

appointed that you went away, making no sign."

"Fool that I was!"

"I have suffered terribly, Frank."

"Can we not put an end to our suffering, Leonora?"

"No, I could not bear the disgrace."

"But think what will be gained for us both by it!"

"But even then I should not consider it right to marry again. It is the mistake of a lifetime, and we must bear it."

"Will you allow that bad man to wreck both our lives in this way? Leonora, darling, remember how many years I have suffered," and he stood before her holding both her hands, looking earnestly at her, a strong man humbled by his great love.

Leonora hesitated. She had for years longed for such a meeting, and for years she had struggled against her love. Her

calmness and serenity were the result of self-control. She fancied, before she went to Copse Hill, that she had subdued all feelings of love ; but the fire was only smothered up, to burn more brightly in the end.

As Frank stood before her, a very picture of strength and tenderness, she longed to be clasped in his arms, and to tell him that she would never separate from him again. For a moment the years of misery were forgotten, and she pictured the divine happiness within her reach. Hundreds of pleasant visions rose before her eyes. The weak, womanish side of her came to the front, and she had almost yielded. But the self-control which she had practised so long came to the rescue.

“No, Frank, it must not be,” she said, speaking in a hard tone, with dry lips and parched tongue. “We must be content to

wait and suffer. Do not say more. I cannot bear it now."

Some little time after Frank Forncett left the hotel, with despair written on his face. If he had known how events were hurrying on which would put an end to the years of disappointment and suffering, his despair might have turned into joy.

Presently he met Temple, who saw only too plainly what the result of the interview had been.

"Run on, child," Temple said to Kate, "and see how mamma is."

"Will she agree to it?" he said to Frank.

"No," answered Frank. "I am afraid she will never be persuaded. I honour her for it, but it is very hard that our lives should be thus broken up by a scoundrel."

"She may change her mind in time, when she has seen something more of you," said Temple.

“I fear not,” said Frank. “She has a strong passionate nature, which she has learnt by suffering to control completely. This gives her more than ordinary strength to bear trouble, and firmness to resist acting in any way against her conscience.”

“You are right, Forncett. She is a grand woman. She has been the greatest comfort to me all these years, and has quite supplied the place of a mother to my little Kate. I don’t think poor Kate has ever understood that disgrace is attached to her mother’s name, and I hope she never may.”

“It would be cruel for me now to take Leonora away from you,” said Frank. “She has been everything in the world to you and little Kate; and yet I cannot help wishing for her. I have borne my disappointment all this time philosophically. I knocked about the world enjoying myself after my own fashion, prepared at any time to marry

if I could find a woman like Leonora. As a younger son, I was not likely to be much sought after. But I never found one who came up to my ideal. I have occasionally come across *that scoundrel*, or seen some mention of him, but I had no idea of what had become of Leonora. I sometimes longed to know, but I thought it better not to inquire. Then some fatality, or what the world would call mere chance, led us to the same little out-of-the-way corner. Up to that time, Temple, I could take the world calmly, but now the old feeling has come upon me with double strength. I have the fiery love of my youth with the strength of my age. I cannot overcome it. All my philosophy is now useless to me. I turn from my books, which have always been my best friends. I can do nothing."

Temple could scarcely realise Forncett's depth of feeling; but he tried to console

him, and give him hope that his wishes would one day be realized.

Kate wrote a long and rather incoherent letter to Mrs. Frowde that afternoon, finishing with this sentence :

“And now if, after all I have told you, you do not think it very wrong, will you send the enclosed to my dear Jack.”

The note to “ dear Jack ” contained only a few simple words of love.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUNSHINE AND SLANDER.

Some thirty miles from Megalopolis,
 Miles also from the shrieking, griding rail,
 On a high road where once the four-horse mail
 Flashed gaily past—so placed my cottage is :
 Roars merrily now the wind tall limes between,
 Which guard my quiet lawn, a triangle scalene.
 And you may see me, if you pass this way,
 Lean on my gate and look into the road,
 And listen to the skylark's joyous ode—
 Thoughtful, not oft cigarless. Will you say,
 “Who wears that velvet coat, a trifle tattered,
 That curious cool straw hat, which wind and rain have
 battered?”

THE broad sunshine lay over the beautiful
 little village of Copse Hill. There was
 a look of peacefulness everywhere. Old

Biggins sat on the bench outside the Pleiades, fast asleep. Mrs. Biggins's pigeons were on the roof, spreading out their wings to catch the sunshine. Miss Tattleton's shop looked lazy and sleepy, though inside was the buzz of gossip, for Mrs. Vypar Voyd was there, gleaning the latest news or lies of the village. There was a continual murmur of bees in the tall limes that overshadowed Manly Frowde's garden.

Manly Frowde, in his old velvet coat and straw hat, leaned over his gate, with his inseparable companions, his wife and dog, watching for the midday post.

"The village seems quite dull," he remarked to his wife, "now that little Kate has gone. It was pleasant to have her running in and out, and see her romping about on her pony. And I miss my occasional chats with Forncett. He is a man worth knowing. What romantic histories there are in

families ! I was astonished at what Temple told us. I wonder how it will end. It was so strange that they should have been brought together in this little corner."

"I think a woman might bear a great deal for such a man as Mr. Forncett," said Mrs. Frowde.

The postman handed them papers and letters, and they walked across the lawn to the house, the old big dog gravely carrying the *Times* newspaper in his mouth.

"Why, here is more romance," said Mrs. Frowde, reading Kate's long letter written in a girlish handwriting. "I had no idea it had gone so far as this. Kate and Jack are actually engaged."

"The little rascal," said Manly, "why didn't she tell us before? I shall write some verses and chaff her."

Manly Frowde had a habit of writing pleasant letters in verse to his friends. To

his lady-friends he often wrote the most charming lines. Kate had already received perhaps a dozen such letters, for he could turn the most trivial incident into poetry.

Such verses are innocently written and received. It never occurred to Kate or Manly Frowde that there were people in the world who would consider these communications between a man and woman as wicked and disreputable.

Kate used to show them to her father and Leonora with great glee, and Mr. Temple had once remarked,

“Take care of them, my child ; you may some day know their value,” which advice, if taken, might have saved the mischief that was afterwards made, when some of them were sent to the wash in the pocket of a gown.

So Manly Frowde’s first impulse, on

hearing that Kate was engaged to Jack, was to write her some verses.

“But it is a great secret,” said Mrs. Frowde; “and she has told no one but me,” and she passed him the letter.

“That is like these children,” he said, “making a secret of it. It is all straight enough, and they need not be afraid; but young lovers always fancy the world is going to interfere with them. You can’t do any harm in sending on the letter, and it will be a consolation to Jack, who looked very downhearted the other day when he came over here.”

So the letter was sent to Jack, and much pleasant nonsense was written to the young people.

In the meantime Mrs. Voyd has been having a long gossip with Miss Tattleton. Miss Tattleton has found out the sort of

news that the vicar likes supplied to him, so she always has a stock ready.

When Mrs. Voyd, overflowing with all she had heard, reached the Vicarage, she found several members of her family in consultation with the vicar.

“It is a serious—a very serious hindrance to me in my work,” said the vicar.

“What a pity we cannot get rid of those Frowdes!” said the Reverend Uriah Urgent.

“What do you think that Mrs. Frowde has done now?” almost shrieked Mrs. Voyd.

“What?” exclaimed many voices eagerly.

“Kitty Fisher went to ask her to pack up some shirts, which had been made in the schools for her boy, to go by post, and the creature positively had the impudence to ask Kitty how much she paid for the shirts. When Kitty told her, she said she could buy such shirts ready made for less than half the price. Fancy her setting the poor people

against us in that way ! It is as good as to say I am a thief."

"Disgraceful!" shouted everybody.

"As if it were her business, whatever I choose to charge," she continued. "The lower classes are quite ungrateful enough without having such ideas put in their heads. Why, the work is done by the school children, and no charge made to them for it; and they're none of them grateful. If Mrs. Frowde is going to interfere in this way, we shall never be able to keep the lower classes in order."

"I have received a letter from her on the subject," said the Rev. Vypar Voyd; "an insulting letter—in fact, I may say a most insulting letter—for it certainly is not her province to interfere with us about the materials used for the garments of the poor."

"And what do you think?" said Mrs.

Voyd—"that Mr. Forncett has gone to the same place as the Temples. I think it looks very odd."

"Ah," said Mr. Voyd, shaking his head, "I am afraid there is more in it than we think. I don't at all like the behaviour of Miss Temple. Of course, with such an example as her father, you cannot expect much; but I pity my friend Sebright, I really do, if he believes in that girl. I am afraid she is bad—very bad. I have heard that she is excessively free both with Mr. Frowde and Mr. Forncett; in fact, I have heard very bad things hinted with reference to her and Mr. Frowde."

"Oh, what is it, Vypar?" asked several Urgent girls at once.

"It is not for you to know," said Mr. Voyd. "I should not like any ladies connected with me to be contaminated with such things."

“What an odious girl !” said one of these sweet young ladies.

“Let her be a warning to you, my dears,” said the Rev. Uriah, in an unctuous tone.

“I really think Vypar ought to warn his friend Mr. Sebright,” said Mrs. Voyd.

“I have done my best,” said the vicar, “to warn my friend ; and if he can be kept from the society of Mr. Frowde, I have no doubt I may make some impression on him. I have pledged my word solemnly—most solemnly—to Mrs. Sebright that I will, if possible, keep her son out of danger, and I am bound—religiously bound—to keep my word.”

“Don’t you think,” said the Rev. Uriah, speaking in a low tone, that his innocent daughters should not hear, “you might call on the Temples, and remonstrate with them as parishioners on their course of life ?”

“It was my intention—my full intention—to do so when they return,” said Mr. Voyd. “I feel that I shall not be performing my duty, if I do not warn them—seriously warn them.”

The Urgent girls were by this time all talking together, and carrying on an affectionate discourse with their sister, Mrs. Voyd, on other people’s affairs.

It never occurred to these young ladies that there was any harm in gossip. They did it for mere excitement. They would cast away a reputation with a few words, in the most reckless way. When they chanted the sixth commandment, on Sundays (they were in the choir), it did not occur to them that there were other ways of committing murder than taking the physical life of a person. We are told in the book of *Wisdom*, chapter the first, verse the eleventh, “The mouth that slandereth, slayeth the

soul." But doubtless these young ladies had not read the Book of Wisdom ; neither perhaps, had they read some capital verses, which appeared in an American paper, on the death of the king of the Cannibal Islands ; some of which are quite worth quoting for the benefit of lovers of gossip,—

How fond he was of children ! To his breast
The tenderest nurslings gained a free admission.
Rank he despised, nor, if they came well *dressed*,
Cared if they were plebeian or patrician.
Shade of Leigh Hunt ! Oh, guide this laggard pen
To write of one who loved his fellow-men !

But the deceased could never hold a candle
To those prim, pale-faced people of propriety
Who gloat o'er gossip and get fat on scandal—
The cannibals of civilized society ;
They drink the blood of brothers with their rations,
And crunch the bones of living reputations.

They kill the soul ; he only claimed the dwelling.
They take the sharpened scalpel of surmises
And cleave the sinews when the heart is swelling,
And slaughter Fame and Honour for their prizes.
They make the spirit in the body quiver ;
They quench the Lights ! He only took the—Liver !

Killing a reputation, more or less, was mere sport to these ladies, and it was rather dull work for them when no sport was to be had. Just now, between the Temples and Frowdes, and Mr. Forncett and Jack Sebright, they had plenty of amusement.

“And now, my dears,” said the Reverend Uriah Urgent to his daughters, “I think we must be going home.”

“Don’t forget the harvest decorations,” said Mrs. Voyd, “I shall expect some of you to come and help me.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Voyd, “I hope you quite understand that I do not want any of Mrs. Frowde’s flowers used in the church. I find she has been in the habit of giving flowers for the decorations, and, though her hyacinths last Easter were beautiful, I have doubts—serious doubts—whether flowers grown by her should be used. She scarcely ever attends church, so she must

not have the privilege of placing flowers there."

"You are quite right," said the Reverend Uriah.

And these two worthy divines felt a comfortable satisfaction in having denounced a woman who appeared to them to be very bad.

This incident of the flowers somehow reached the ears of Manly Frowde, who immediately threw off the following epigram—

The Vicar in the joyous autumn hours
Deems Christ insulted by a sinner's flowers,
Yet Christ the pitiful had no such sneers
When once a sinner washed his feet with tears.

Did it ever occur to the vicar that one who heartily loves flowers cannot be quite blind to God, the giver of flowers? But perhaps the vicar's mind was too much occupied with dogma to be able to catch at so simple a truth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COPSE HILL AND WINDERMERE.

Somebody to love—lawfully, you know, of course—is what few men or women can do without. I should feel a very poor creature if there were not a pleasant group of friends (of both sexes, mind you, for I believe in female friendships) who would not be loyal to me as I to them. But the One to love! That is the light of life.

A Fight with Fortune.

COPSE HILL was always famous for gossip. It could hardly be otherwise while a woman of so much wit as Miss Tattleton held the village shop. She knew how to embellish a tale to suit the exact taste of the listener, and she would tell it

in half a dozen different ways to the different people who came to gossip. If it was the latest news of the "author over the way" (and this seemed the chief excitement in the village), she would give one version to Squire Perivale when he turned in for a gossip, another to Mrs. Lovelace, another to the parish clergywoman, another to Mrs. Voyd, and another to "old Uriah," as she called the Vicar of Battlefield. There were other places in the village where gossip could be had, but no one could tell a tale so well as Miss Tattleton. So long as these worthy people who frequented her shop heard what she had to say of their neighbours, but not what she said of themselves, they found it pleasant pastime. Miss Tattleton was everybody's friend, and everybody's enemy. She was such a curious mixture of good-nature and spite that it was impossible to say which quality predominated. Just

as she had done some kind and brave action which made you forget that she ever had a fault, she would do or say something so extraordinarily spiteful that you forgot she had a spark of kindness in her. But her gossip had, perhaps, seldom been taken very seriously until now. Any remark of hers, however strong, was not considered sufficient to take away a person's character.

Biggins also liked a bit of gossip, and had a rough way of making remarks on the people as they walked or drove past the inn.

"Ah," grunted Biggins, as a carriage containing two ladies passed, "a nice lot of tales the tiles of their roof could tell if they could speak," and then he would relate horrible things, which, if true, would show that the family were guilty of dreadful crimes.

In fact, if all the stories were true which Miss Tattleton and Biggins had to tell of

the various families, Copse Hill ought to be destroyed from off the face of the earth, for Sodom and Gomorrah were nothing to it.

But the gossip had hitherto been confined to the lower classes. It was not until Mr. Voyd, in his eagerness for reform in the parish, encouraged people to talk of their neighbours, that any importance was attached to it. When Miss Tattleton and Biggins found that their tales were listened to, they took the more pleasure in telling them, and embellishing them. They began to find themselves of some mark in the village, since they were of so much use to the vicar. They were even beginning to forget their differences with this common bond of union between them, and Biggins had gone so far as to post *some* of his letters at Miss Tattleton's.

With the help of these two village worthies, and the Miss Urgents, and Mrs. Vypar

Voyd, and Mr. Voyd's good intentions, the stories concerning the Temples, the Frowdes, Jack Sebright, and Mr. Forncett, soon became so multiplied and ornamented that a very pretty little history was made up. 'Tis true the various tales did not always agree, but it was generally settled that Mr. Temple lived with some one who was not his wife, that Miss Temple was a "bold, forward girl, who had entrapped Jack Sebright, and was carrying on with Mr. Forncett and Mr. Frowde."

"I have positively seen that man Frowde kiss that girl in the dusk of the evening at her gate in the lane. They didn't know I was looking, though," said one gossip.

"Oh ! and have you heard the last news of her?" said another. "She's had verses written to her by that man, for Widow Wright found them in the pocket of her dress when it went to the wash, and I've

heard they've been given up to the parson's hands."

So our little heroine had by this time got a very bad character, and, as the gossips expressed it, "none of the lot were any better than they should be."

While all this mischief was brewing, the Temples, unconscious of what was in store for them on their return to Copse Hill, were quietly enjoying life at Windermere.

Kate has been longing to tell her secret to Leonora. She is obliged to muster up all her resolution to keep it to herself. Every morning, when she wakes, she wonders whether she will get through the day without getting rid of her great secret; but she argues with herself that Jack knows best, and that he told her to be patient for a little time, only it seems a very long time to her. She sympathises with Leonora, but Leonora is too much taken up with the fight

that is going on in her own mind between a sense of duty and a longing for happiness to notice any difference in Kate.

On a misty-bright October morning, Mr. Temple and Leonora and Kate are out walking, when Frank Forncett joins them. Kate soon manages to get her father somewhat in advance of Frank and Leonora, thinking they will like to be left together.

They loiter on, talking in easy, friendly fashion, as if they were mere pleasant acquaintances. And yet how difficult they both find it to keep up that easy chat! They are both suffering from intense joy and intense pain. They are both strong, noble characters, full of feeling, and yet firm enough to repress feeling when necessary. They have practised repression for years, and now the youthful love they have so long repressed has broken out into an almost unquenchable fire. Can they now repress it? They are

trying to do so. They are happy in their love—for love must bring happiness, however much misery it may also bring—and they are miserable because they are trying to repress their love. The anguish of high natures like these cannot be realized by many; but then happiness is in proportion to it. Here are two people who are absolutely one in heart and soul: their spirits have commingled: yet must they act the part of mere acquaintances. So they walk along on that bright October morning, trying to act their part.

They come to a point where the walking is rough, and Frank offers his arm to Leonora. She hesitates before accepting it, knowing well the magnetism there is in the touch of one we love. She unconsciously looked up at Frank, and his eyes met hers. The mischief was done without the touch of the hands, and the acting broken for the

moment. She accepted his help, and they walked on silently for some time.

“Leonora,” said Frank presently, “it is useless for us to act in this way; I cannot bear it. I love you madly, passionately. I cannot live without you. Why were we brought together in this curious manner, if we are to be again separated? Surely it is best to get happiness at any price. Leonora, have pity on me!” and he kissed her passionately.

“Frank, Frank, it must not be. Your love cannot be greater than mine.”—He looked gratefully at her.—“I have as much to bear as you have, and you should help me to bear it, instead of tempting me. We must be merely friends, or we must separate altogether.”

“No, not separate, Leonora. Now I have found you, we will not separate, but if you decree that we are to be friends only,

I must obey, though ever so reluctantly. But, Leonora, do think what happiness is within reach !”

“Frank, you are cruel to talk thus. You must help me to bear it. Now give me your hand, and let us make a solemn compact that we will be friends, dear and intimate friends, if you like, but that nothing but words of friendship shall pass between us.”

Frank gave his hand and promised.

“My life will be a happier one for your companionship,” said Leonora, “and perhaps, as years go on, we shall really become friends, and forget there was ever any other feeling between us.”

“That would be impossible,” said Frank.

And so Frank and Leonora walked on side by side, merely a couple of friends, and yet with a love between them that nothing

could quench. How they will keep their compact, we shall see.

The Temples returned to Copse Hill, Leonora happy with the idea that Frank's society would add to the pleasure of their quiet life.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRIESTLY MISSION.

Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny.

Hamlet.

The owl may hoot, the bat may hiss,
Yet doves will coo, and sweethearts kiss :
I do not deem the deed amiss—

What say you, lady mine?

M. C.

OUR friends were not destined to have
the quiet life upon which they
calculated.

The vicar was full of good intentions—
more than usually full—and, as he remarked
himself, “no time must be lost in warning

those people seriously of the danger of their mode of life." Moreover, he had pledged himself to Mrs. Sebright to take means to break off the connection between her son and the Frowdes and Kate Temple. Therefore, one morning he started from the vicarage wearing a more saintly smile than ever.

He nodded patronisingly to his parishioners as he passed them, and entered the gate at Winterslow with no misgivings as to his capacity for undertaking such a mission. But he was a little nervous when Mr. Temple received him, and he found it difficult to open the subject on which he came.

Mr. Temple, supposing he was merely making a call, perhaps for some parish subscription, made it the more difficult by conversing freely on general subjects, thinking thereby to diminish the vicar's embarrassment. William Temple possessed the natural

politeness which induces a man to put everyone about him at ease; he had, moreover, a courtly manner. The more he tried to put Mr. Voyd at ease, the more nervous the vicar became.

The subject of the weather had been exhausted, and the bad harvest lamented, and the prospects of the root crops discussed, and the probable condition of the poor during the coming winter commented on.

“Now,” thought Mr. Temple, “he will be able to mention the subscription if he wants one.”

But no: the vicar did not mention a subscription, and only looked more nervous than ever. Mr. Temple felt uncomfortable at not being able to put him at ease, and said presently, in a kind tone.

“I shall be only too glad, Mr. Voyd, to help you in your parish work so far as my purse is concerned; but I fear I can be of

little use in any other way. What can I do for you?"

This was awkward for Mr. Voyd. He had come to censure this man, who appeared to him to be leading an evil life, and he was received with such courtesy and kindness that his tongue seemed to be tied. If he had been a judge of character he could never for a moment have mistaken the fine frank fellow who stood there on the hearthrug, showing so clearly in his face that mixture of severity and tenderness which is often seen in great characters. William Temple was a polished gentleman; but he was something more—a natural gentleman. Suffering for years from the faults and weaknesses of others, he was perhaps a little intolerant of weakness, and was rather inclined to look upon stupidity as a crime.

But the vicar was no judge of character. Still he had some sort of instinct which made

him feel that the man standing before him was a much greater man than himself, and that it was an awkward thing to have to reprove him. He began to wish he had not undertaken the mission. He almost thought he would abandon it at the last moment. It even occurred to him that his father-in-law, the Rev. Uriah Urgent, being an older man, would manage the business better. The vicar had never felt so little confidence in himself before. He was a man who thoroughly believed in himself.

But there was one quality in the vicar on which he most prided himself—a quality which must be deemed good or bad according to results—namely, a dogged sense of duty. Most people would term it a *high* sense of duty; but *high sense* can only exist in high natures. To go blindly and doggedly at duty does as much harm as good.

This sense of duty came to the vicar's

aid on this occasion. He argued with himself that, however great William Temple might be, he, by virtue of his office, was placed above him, and it was his duty, both for the example set to his parishioners, and for Temple's own sake, to warn him of the consequences of living in a state of sin. These thoughts had been slowly making their way through the vicar's mind while Temple had been endeavouring to relieve him of his embarrassment.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Voyd?” Mr. Temple repeated. “Is it coals, or a soup-kitchen, or blankets, or flannel petticoats that are wanted?” he added laughing. “Pray make use of my purse for any or all.”

“Really, Mr. Temple, you are kind—very kind——” stammered out the vicar, turning red in the face, and shifting his

legs uneasily ; “ but it is not for any subscription I have called this morning.”

“ Indeed !” said Mr. Temple, losing something of his pleasant manner, for his thoughts travelled quickly, and the vicar spoke and thought slowly, and a slow-brained man is excessively irritating to a quick one.

“ I have come this morning to perform a duty—a most painful duty,” slowly proceeded the vicar.

“ Indeed !” said Temple. “ Pray let me know quickly what it is.”

This was trying to the vicar. It was just what he could not do. He was in the habit of being deliberate—most deliberate—as he would himself express it ; and it is probable that it was to give himself time to think while talking that he formed the habit of continually repeating his phrases with the

addition of an emphatic adjective. Mr. Temple's impatience did not help him.

"Really," he went on hesitatingly, "I feel that my task is an excessively painful one."

"Yes?" said Temple interrogatively, and in an unconcerned tone.

The vicar felt more and more discouraged. He thought he would go to the point at once.

"Common report——" he began more boldly.

"Common report is a common liar, sir," quickly said Temple.

Mr. Voyd looked up astonished at what he considered rather strong language, not knowing it was a quotation, for his literature extended not much beyond the Commentators and the *Guardian*, to which authorities he often referred. The remark was not encouraging.

“What I mean,” said the Vicar, “is that your mode of life is subject to remark—to much remark—amongst your neighbours.”

“Mr. Voyd,” said Temple, very severely, “you surely do not intend to waste your own and my time by repeating to me what is the opinion of my neighbours concerning my mode of life? May I beg that this interview may terminate?” and he made a gesture towards the door.

The Vicar was getting very uncomfortable. He found this polished gentleman difficult to manage. He could in no way meet him on his own ground. But, having gone so far, his dogged sense of duty urged him on. He tried to come to the point at once. He felt that it was urgent; that he must seize the opportunity now, or he would lose it, for he would never care to encounter William Temple again, so he blurted out—

“It is really only a most important sense of

duty that urges me to warn you of the danger of continuing your mode of life. I"—and here he stammered very much—"I—understand—that you have—in fact—that you are—living in open breach of the Seventh Commandment." He lowered his voice to a whisper as he said, the last words, as if even the mention of such a thing were only too horrible, and he wore a saintly look of reproof. The whole manner of the speech might be said by an unfeeling critic to be theatrical, and well calculated to take effect. What effect did it have upon the man to whom it was addressed?

Anyone accustomed to him would have noticed a variety of expressions pass over his face as he stood there silent for a minute. Presently he said, with a sarcastic smile, and in a low tone as if to himself,

"I wonder why God sent so many fools

into the world." To Mr. Voyd he turned and said, in a pitying tone,

"I've no doubt your motive in thus speaking to me is good, and that you imagined you had cause so to speak, but you have made an unfortunate mistake."

The Vicar, who had begun to take courage and to congratulate himself on having got through the worst part of his task, now felt more wretched than ever. He had not calculated on any mistake, neither had he calculated on such calmness. If Temple would only lose his temper, he felt he might have the advantage : but there he stood—a calm, severe, well-bred man. What could the Vicar do next?

"It is on authority—most reliable authority—that I speak," he said.

"The name of your authority, if you please," said Temple.

“I am bound—in honour bound—not to give it up.”

“You can scarcely call any authority reliable without the name. But ’tis no matter,” he said unconcernedly. The whole thing seemed so contemptible to him.

“I am very sorry,” began the Vicar.

“Oh ! pray don’t trouble to mention it,” said Temple. “I merely demand, for the sake of the lady who is attacked with myself, that an apology shall be made by the person whom you style your most reliable authority. That person will probably like to know all circumstances concerning my family. You may therefore tell him that, about twenty years ago, I married a very young lady. I imagined she loved me, but perhaps she was too young to know her own mind. Some few years after my sister married Mr. Arundel Lifton. That marriage proved even more unfortunate than my own,

for Mr. Lifton very soon left her, and took with him my wife. I obtained a divorce—my sister would not, as she could not bear the disgrace of having her name in court. She came to live under my protection, and took charge of my little girl, to whom she has been a mother. She would not use the name of that infamous man, her husband, so took her maiden name ; but mistakes are often made, as my little girl regards her as a mother, and addresses her as such. She hoped, in this corner of the world, to live peacefully and quietly, but it seems we are mistaken. That is all I have to say.”

“I am sorry—truly sorry——” began the Vicar again, but Mr. Temple interrupted him.

“Pray say nothing. I am sure your intentions are good, but you have been unfortunate in this matter.” And Mr. Temple was proceeding to open the door, but Mr.

Voyd had other good intentions, which he had not fulfilled yet. He felt that hitherto he had been at a decided disadvantage, but he thought what he had now to say might rather alter matters.

“I was commissioned by Mrs. Sebright,” said Mr. Voyd, feeling it was easy to shift the responsibility to some one else, “to speak to you about her son, who is a very dear friend of mine.”

“I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Sebright, though I know her son; but don’t you think it would be advisable for her to communicate with me herself?” Mr. Temple was getting tired of the Vicar.

The Vicar did not think it was advisable: it was not what he wanted.

“Scarcely, I think,” he said. “The fact is, the matter rather lies within my province, but it concerns you nearly—very nearly; in fact, it concerns Miss Temple.”

“Miss Temple!” said Temple, for once a little astonished.

“Yes,” said the Vicar, seeing his advantage, “Miss Temple is excessively intimate with those people next door, the Frowdes.”

“I am aware of it,” said Temple.

“I have reason—grave reason—to fear that the Frowdes are very undesirable acquaintances.”

“That must be left to my judgment,” said Temple.

“Mrs. Sebright is most anxious that her son should not visit there,” said Mr. Voyd.

“I do not know Mrs. Sebright, and I cannot enter into her anxious feelings.”

“Her son has met Miss Temple there.”

“I am aware of it.”

“She has cause—good cause—to fear that there is some entanglement between her son and Miss Temple.”

“Entanglement between my daughter and Mr. Sebright? Pray explain.”

The Vicar found it difficult to explain.

“I really do not wish to hurt your feelings,” he began.

“It is not a matter of *feeling*, it is *fact* that I require.”

“I am reluctant—very reluctant, to relate what I have actually seen happen between the young people, but I feel it to be my duty—my bounden duty—to my dear friend Mrs. Sebright, to whom I have pledged my word—my most solemn word—that I will guard her son’s interests. I have been a witness—a most unwilling witness—on two occasions—of familiarities that have passed between Mr. Sebright and your daughter.”

The vicar stopped here to see what effect his words produced, but Mr. Temple simply said,

“Go on.”

The vicar was taking courage and forgetting his nervousness.

“What Mr. Sebright’s intentions towards Miss Temple may be I do not know ; he has not confided them to his mother, to whom he is accustomed to tell everything, but I fear your daughter does not think seriously of him, as I hear that her behaviour with your neighbour Mr. Frowde is open to very grave remark.”

“I think after the experience of this morning, Mr. Voyd, we will confine our attention to what you have *seen*, not what you have heard.”

“Unfortunately, I have proof—visible proof—of the feeling that exists between Miss Temple and Mr. Frowde. This letter”—producing a paper inscribed with the unmistakable, strong handwriting of Mr.

Frowde—"is, I think you will acknowledge, from Mr. Frowde to your daughter."

"It is," said Mr. Temple, "and what harm is there in it?"

"I think those are hardly the terms in which a gentleman should address a lady who is not related to him," said the vicar.

Mr. Temple stood in thought for a moment, twisting the scrap of paper in his hand.

"Capital handwriting it is," he said, as if to himself; then turning to Mr. Voyd, he said politely,

"I really need not trouble you to prolong this interview; I will see Mrs. Sebright myself. Allow me to open the door," and he walked across the hall to the front door. "Good morning. Rest assured I will see Mrs. Sebright."

The vicar would rather not have rested in this assurance.

He was a little uncomfortable. He had made a mistake ; but he consoled himself with the thought that he had done it with the best intentions. Yet he walked back to the Vicarage with a disappointed feeling. He even forgot to nod approvingly to his parishioners as he passed them, and he allowed a carriage containing ladies of the neighbourhood to pass without the salute on which he prided himself—which was always accompanied by the saintly smile and the exhibition of the row of shining teeth.

What could have vexed him so much? Was he sorry at having made a mistake, or was there somewhere in his heart behind that dogged sense of duty a love of a spicy little bit of scandal ?

Then he tried to persuade himself that at least he had done something in the matter of Jack Sebright and Miss Temple.

Still he felt not altogether happy about that, for Mr. Temple had not taken it as he expected, and had dismissed him rather abruptly.

He had yet the pleasure of telling Mrs. Voyd the history of Mr. Temple's misfortunes, and she of course told the seven Miss Urgents, and they of course told all their various acquaintances for miles round; and whether it was the vicar's fault, or Mrs. Voyd's, or the seven Miss Urgents', will never be known, but by the time the story reached Miss Tattleton, and went out with the tea, and sugar, and candles from her shop, it was generally reported that there was "something wrong at the house over there, and the lady is no more Mrs. Temple than I am, and that's why she never shows herself; and the young lady has been carrying on with Mr. Frowde and several other gentlemen." And all this arose from

the mistakes of a well-intentioned young vicar. He really did it with the best intentions.

CHAPTER XX.

VISITORS TO COPSE HILL.

What wretches are hordinary servants that go hon in the same vulgar track every day! eating, working, and sleeping! But we who have the honour to serve the nobility, are of another speeches. We are above the common forms.

High Life below Stairs.

AFTER closing the door on the vicar, Mr. Temple walked into his library and sat down to think. He was distressed by a variety of feelings. Nothing irritated him so much as stupidity, and to Mr. Temple the vicar seemed very stupid. There was

something in the vicar's manner especially irritating to a quick-brained man. He talked slowly and with diffidence, as if he were open to correction, yet there never was a man less ready to receive a new idea. He would make up his mind doggedly and stolidly on any subject, and the cleverest man could not make him alter it. Probably he had no room in his brain for a change of opinion. Mr. Temple's foremost feeling was that he had been most unpleasantly irritated for the last half hour. He found it difficult to quiet his nerves and think it all over.

Thus he soliloquised :

“Why need one care what people of this sort say? Unfortunately, people of this sort are in the majority, and one is at their mercy. Being in the majority, they can make the world uncomfortable. But why

are fools in the majority? Fancy the fellow making mischief out of this little scrap! I wonder where he got it from?"

He was still twisting Manly Frowde's letter in his hand.

"In league with servants, I suppose. Of course, after what he said about this, there's nothing in his ridiculous remarks about young Sebright. Young people probably romping or flirting. I'll mention it to Leonora. No, perhaps it will be best to say nothing about it; it might put the idea into the child's head, if she heard of it, and I don't want her to fall in love for a few years. Young Sebright's a fine young fellow, but he'll probably marry soon, and I can't spare Kate yet. We'd better get away from here for a month or two. It's disappointing just as we've settled down, and it's humiliating to be driven away by people of this sort, but it will not do for Kate to hear

all this gossip. They will find some new subject by the time we return, and young Sebright will perhaps be appointed to a living at a distance. Poor Leonora! There's no peace anywhere."

Leonora appeared at this moment, and put an end to Mr. Temple's train of thought. She looked younger and handsomer than she had done for ten years. When a woman is in love she generally improves in appearance; and although Leonora tried to persuade herself that from henceforth there would be only a friendship between Frank and herself, she was truly and desperately in love; with a love much stronger and deeper than any girl's could be.

"William," she said, "there's Lord Medway's four-in-hand just arrived. They look such a merry party. Frank was on the box seat, and I suppose it was Lord Medway driving—but he's not at all like his father or

Frank ; and the Earl is there and two young men, who, I daresay, are Lord Medway's friends."

Ralph was at the gate to receive them, and went round with the servants and horses to the inn.

"What a change it will be for Ralph to have so many in the house, and what a merry party they'll be !"

"Yes," said Temple, "and I was hoping that you would have joined a little in their merriment, but I find I am suddenly wanted in town, on some political business, Leonora, and I don't know how long I may be detained there, and I know you will not like to be left alone."

"Oh, William," said Leonora, losing the colour which love or the bright October air had given to her cheeks, "why must you go now? Surely there is nothing to do in October when everyone is away."

“It is absolutely necessary, I must go, and at once. I should like to start to-morrow,” said William.

Leonora did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Since her compact with Frank she had been a far happier woman, because love must necessarily bring happiness. But she often doubted whether she was right in remaining within sight of the man she loved ; whether it would not be better to go away and forget him altogether. She had been looking forward eagerly to the arrival of Frank, and the commencement of that friendship and companionship that they had planned together ; and yet she knew that her own nature and Frank’s were such that it was almost impossible to keep the compact. Now she was superstitious enough to imagine that fate had interposed to prevent her from seeing him. William Temple could not understand such depth of love as his sister

had for Frank, and he took the change in her face to mean merely disappointment.

“Never mind, Leonora,” he said, “you’ll see Frank often enough when we come back.”

While Mr. Temple and his sister are making arrangements to go to town, Ralph has gone round with Lord Medway’s drag and servants to see if they can have stable room at the Pleiades. In the old coaching days thirty-six coaches a day passed the inn, and many of them changed horses there, so the stabling accommodation is large in proportion to the house, and there was not room for the horses at The Birches.

Biggins, who was no friend to Ralph, and spoke of him generally as “that seedy chap,” was a little more respectful when he saw him in company of what he afterwards described as “them two flash servants, and they

fine cattle," and went to ask him what he could do for him.

Ralph explained that he wanted to put up Lord Medway's coach and horses for two or three days.

"What! your master got a real live lord down here!" said Biggins, in a lively tone. "You don't mean it, though, do you?" and he dug his fat elbow into Ralph's side, and gave as knowing a wink as the overhanging fat on his eyelids and cheeks would let him.

"You great fool!" said Ralph contemptuously. "Don't you know my master is brother to Lord Ravensbourne, and young Lord Medway, that this coach belongs to, is his nephew? Why, I thought everyone knew that!"

"Well, I never!" said Biggins, in astonishment—"d—n my eyes, if I did."

Biggins always resorted to this condemnatory allusion to the eyes when he was at a loss to express his feelings.

“Well,” said Ralph, “don’t stand gaping there, but just tell me whether we can put up here.”

“Oh, yes, certainly, sir,” said Biggins, who was beginning to regard Ralph as a great man. “Well, I never!” he went on, half to himself. “I always thought that Forncett was one of his sort!”—pointing his thumb over his shoulder in the usual way towards Frowde’s place—“a regular shabby lot in their seedy old coats, with their old books about the place. Well, I never!”

Lord Medway’s servants were much amused. Lords were to them so common that they did not always think it necessary to use the appellation when talking in private, and “Young Medway” and “Old

Ravensbourne's "merits were often discussed in the kitchen.

Old Biggins went waddling about as lively as possible, delighted at the idea of showing all his old cronies, as they came in for their glass of ale and the newest bit of scandal, the coach and horses of Lord Medway.

The servants, seeing that Biggins regarded them as great men, did not fail to take advantage of it, and during the next few days they were treated to anything and everything they liked at the Pleiades. They certainly made good use of the hospitality offered, though they agreed between themselves that what was supplied to them was "beastly stuff," and that the inhabitants of Copse Hill evidently did not know what good liquor was, or they'd never stand it. They, on the other hand, treated the villagers to such a

history of the ways and doings of the nobility, and spoke with such familiarity of great lords, that they left subject for gossip to last nearly all through the coming winter.

When the servants returned to The Birches, and Frank had disposed of his various visitors in their rooms to get ready for dinner, he thought he would run across to Winterslow to tell them of his arrival. At least, that is what he persuaded himself was his reason for going.

“If there ain’t the master off at once over the way,” said Ralph to Mary as he went into the kitchen.

“And I only hope he’ll be back in time, and not spoil the dinner,” said Mary, who was too anxious to show what she could do in the way of cooking, to care at that moment either about Ralph or her master.

The master, meanwhile, has received a

welcome at Winterslow, and is disappointed to hear of the visit to town. It will spoil all the fun, he says, so he begs them to come in that evening after dinner. Leonora asks to be omitted in the invitation, but Frank will not hear of it, and she is easily persuaded to go.

Kate, who is in very low spirits at having to go to London because she is expecting her Jack home soon, cheers up at the idea of going out after dinner, and wonders why Leonora is so easily persuaded to join them.

"Why, mamma," she says, "you're getting quite gay. I do so like Mr. Forncett. What a pity you can't marry him, isn't it?"

"Hush, child," said Leonora, "we don't want to marry, we are only very great friends."

Kate turned this over in her mind as she stood pulling on her glove, and she fastened and unfastened the button in a fidgetty way

two or three times, and then she said—

“Mamma, at what age do people leave off being in love?”

“You silly little Kate, asking such questions ; what do you know about love?”

Kate was very much inclined to say she knew a good deal about it, but she felt she must keep her great secret a little longer, till Jack came home.

“Don’t you bother your little head about such matters,” said Leonora.

But the question troubled Leonora, and rather interfered with the resolution she had just made up in her own mind that she would try to crush out the love from her heart, and look upon Frank simply as a friend.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MERRY MEETING.

The play, so to speak, of a graceful and intelligent woman, is the most charming thing in the world. She is the consummate flower of creation, The light of her eyes, the movement of her lips, the tones of her voice, are all worth watching ; her easy chat has no wisdom in it, mayhap, nor any wit, yet is as fresh as dew and as fragrant as may-bloom ; she brings to a manly and poetic mind the same pleasure—in a higher degree—as that produced by a summer landscape, with emerald grass and translucent water, and birds in full song amid the airy branches of the trees.

THE party that the Temples found congregated at The Birches consisted of Frank Forncett, his brother Charles, Earl of Ravensbourne, Charles Forncett the

younger, by courtesy Lord Medway, Harry Rivers, and Lord Arun, the latter being for the present Lord Medway's most particular friend.

Leonora had met Lord Ravensbourne at Temple Cloud many years ago : how many need not be counted, as his lordship remarked when he paid her a compliment on her youthful appearance.

Introductions were made, and everyone was soon at ease. Kate was flattered and petted by all.

"Sweet girl, Frank. Like the mother, I suppose," said Lord Ravensbourne.

"I don't know, I never saw Mrs. Temple. They were at Constantinople when I used to visit Temple Cloud."

"What a fool you were to miss that woman, Frank ! What a grand creature she is ! Why doesn't she get a divorce from that scoundrel Lifton, and then there might

be some chance for you. For you know you're not an old man yet, Frank."

"Hush! don't speak of Lifton in that way while young Arun is within hearing," said Frank. "He turned round as you mentioned the name."

"Oh! Val is no lover of his cousin. The poor boy is always lamenting over some widow that it seems Lifton prevented him from marrying. He played him some rascally trick over it. Whether he wanted her for himself, I can't say, but she was probably some designing creature, old enough to be Val's mother, and whatever Lifton's conduct may have been, I daresay it was the best thing that could happen for Val, though he doesn't think so. So young hopeful has cut his Mentor and cousin for the present."

"Infamous man!" said Frank, alluding to Lifton.

“Well,” said the Earl, “he is simply a man who walks coolly through life, knocking down every obstacle in his way, without the slightest regard to anyone’s feelings. I suppose there are many like him.”

“I hope not,” said Frank. “He has spoilt the lives of several people, and will probably spoil many more. Well, Harry,” he said, turning to Harry Rivers, “I wonder whether you are still as eager to come and settle down in a cottage here, and nail up roses and honeysuckles to your walls, and live amongst these primitive villagers, as you were this time last year.”

Harry laughed; he had tasted life a little, and, to tell the truth, he was not quite so anxious for the way of living which had seemed so fascinating to him.

“My friend Temple here,” Frank proceeded, “has taken the house which, you remember, Miss Tattleton thought would

suit you. I think she offered to find you a wife also, didn't she?"

"Yes," said Harry, laughing, "I believe she offered me a choice of seven. But really," said Harry, seriously, "I never shall forget the day when we first came in sight of this village. I thought I had never seen a prettier spot. All looked so peaceful and happy, and it seemed impossible that there could be wickedness or malice or ill-feeling in such a place. There was the picturesque inn, with its portly landlord, and the village shop, with its buxom shopwoman; and there was that fine fellow, Manly Frowde, looking like the poetic spirit of the place, wandering about with his book, and followed by his splendid dog."

"Yes, Harry thought he had found Arcadia," said Frank. "Do you," turning to Temple, "find it all as Harry describes?"

"I can hardly say I do," said Temple,

remembering his interview of the morning.

While this conversation is going on, Lord Medway and Lord Arun are talking together.

“I say, by Jove! you know—uncommonly pretty creature.” Lord Arun was speaking of Kate.

“Yes,” said his companion, “she’s not amiss.”

“’Pon honour, Charlie, she reminds me of some one—don’t you know—so uncommon-like. By Jove! she has just the same ways, don’t you know. She might be her sister.”

“Who *are* you talking about, Val?”

“Why, you know—don’t you know—when that fellow Lifton, you know—when I was so cut up.”

“Now, Val, you know that’s a subject I won’t stand. I was hoping you had forgotten all about the widow.”

But Lord Arun had not by any means forgotten the widow.

When he went to Paris in search of her, and could not find her, he returned to England, and left no stone unturned till he traced her to her hiding-place in Rowell St. Dunstan. Hearing where she was, immediately, in the joy of his heart, he told his cousin Arundel Lifton.

Now whether Lifton really wanted to do a good action for once in his life, and save the boy from making a fool of himself, or whether he liked practising cruelty on Flora, it is difficult to determine; but he acted with prompt severity on this occasion. He managed to keep Lord Arun from going at once to Rowell by appointing to go with him in a few days. He then went down himself, obtained an interview with Flora, and easily managed to make her promise to leave Rowell immediately, and never marry

Lord Arun. He came back to Valentine, told him that Flora had left, and that it was useless for him to think of marrying her, as she was a disreputable character, and had, moreover, a husband living.

Lord Arun, who would not tell a lie himself, implicitly believed his cousin, and tried to forget Flora.

Before he had succeeded in banishing her from his mind, a letter reached him which brought back his love tenfold.

Whatever there was good in Flora, and there is some good in all of us, it had been developed by Lord Arun. He trusted her so completely, and was so thoroughly honourable, that he woke up a sense of goodness in her. He did not treat her as a toy or plaything, as other men did. She was not in love, for she had been once, and once only, and that was with Arundel Lifton. All she cared for since he left her was to

have the admiration of men. She had played the same game with Lord Arun as with other men. She tried to gain his admiration, and easily succeeded; but she found some new feeling rising within her. She began to be ashamed of the power of attraction on which she had hitherto prided herself; she began to wish that she had led an honourable life that she might be worthy of this man who was so true and good to her. Then she determined that she would not disgrace him by marrying him, but would get out of his way, and atone for the past. For this reason she went to Rowell. When Lifton found her there, she saw the importance of keeping out of Lord Arun's way, and left at once; but she was anxious to show the man she so much admired that he had been the means of making her a better woman, and she felt that, before parting for ever from Lord Arun, she would

like to be honest with him and tell him all her story ; so, after many attempts at a letter, she sent the following :

“DEAR LORD ARUN,

“Mr. Lifton came to warn me to keep out of your way, and to make me promise never to marry you. It was unnecessary, as I had made up my mind to it before. I daresay he told you what a wicked creature I have been, and by this time you must hate me ; but, dear Lord Arun, I want you not to hate me, but pity me. When I first saw you, I only wanted to make you admire me. I lived only for admiration ; but I found you so true and good that I was sorry I had made you love me.

“I am not fit to be in your thoughts for a moment, but do pity me. When I tell you who it was that ruined me, I know you will pity me. You know what his power

is. Your cousin, Mr. Lifton, was the only man I ever loved, and he took me away from my husband when I was very young, and then cruelly left me. I am divorced from my husband and am quite alone in the world, without a name, or position, or friends.

“Do not tell Mr. Lifton what I have told you, or he will only find me out, and be more cruel to me. I seem never to be able to get out of reach of his cruelty. I am frightened of him. I am going to shut myself up away from everyone, and make up for my wicked life, but I shall always think of you as the kindest and best man I have ever met. Think of me with pity, and as a poor little woman, with no other name than

“FLORA.”

This letter roused Lord Arun to a high

state of indignation. Lifton had the reputation of having ruined so many women that it did not occur to him to inquire which one this was. He swore he would never speak to Lifton again in his life, and he spared neither money nor pains in making search for Flora. Young Lord Medway was his particular friend at this time, and in him he confided. He spent the greater part of his time in lamenting Flora, and denouncing Lifton. Valentine had never made any secret of his love for Flora, and Lord Medway openly chaffed him about it, so the remark that "Arun's pretty widow has disappeared, and Lifton had something to do with it," went the round of Lord Arun's friends, and Lifton was credited with one more victim.

Lord Medway had succeeded in making Valentine talk and think less of Flora; indeed he had at last absolutely refused to

listen to either laments of Flora or denunciations of Lifton. So on this evening, when Valentine was reminded by Kate of Flora, he thought he would put a stop to the subject at once, and seeing his father disengaged at that moment, he joined him.

“Uncle Frank seems snug down here, doesn’t he, father? And he’s got some charming neighbours, too, it seems. We shall hear of the old boy marrying next.”

“I’ll tell you a secret, my boy,” said the Earl. “You remember you’ve sometimes heard us joke about your uncle having had a love-disappointment in his youth?”

“Yes,” said the boy, “I’ve heard some sort of tradition about it, but thought it was all fun.”

“That is the lady,” said the Earl, looking in the direction of Leonora.

“By Jove! what a fine woman! What

an aunt she'd have been for a fellow ! One might be proud of her. But tell me, who is she now ? They introduced her as Temple's sister, didn't they ? Is she married ?

"Hush ! don't speak too loudly. Come closer. She married that scamp Lifton."

"What ?" said Charlie. "Poor Val's *bête noire* ? I didn't know he was married."

"The scandal was hushed up long ago, and is forgotten. Lifton went away with Temple's wife, the mother of that pretty little girl, and Temple's sister has lived with him ever since. I remember something of it all at the time ; but Frank has just been telling me all about it. It was odd they should meet again in this quiet corner of the world."

"By Jove ! it *is* odd !" said Charlie ;
"but what I lament is that I've lost that handsome aunt. 'Pon my word, I'm almost

in love with her myself! Why doesn't she get divorced from that man?"

"She isn't the woman to do that sort of thing," said the Earl. "You can see she would bear any trouble nobly."

When the party dispersed in the evening, and Frank's guests retired to their rooms, Lords Medway and Arun sat over their bedroom fire together. To provide for visitors and servants, all available space had been used at The Birches, and a bed was made for Lord Arun in the dressing-room attached to his friend's bedroom.

With Ralph "the Earl" was a great man, not so much because he was an Earl, but that he was his master's brother, and the "young lord" whom Ralph had known since he was a boy, was also an object of veneration. He had always studied his tastes, and knew how to administer to his

wants, from the jam tarts of boyhood to the brandy and soda and cigars of the present time.

Therefore just as the two young men had sat down for a chat, Ralph appeared with a tray containing various articles which he thought might be wanted.

“ Well, Ralph,” said Lord Medway, “ you and the master have settled down very comfortably here, eh ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” replied Ralph ; “ the place is small, but it suits us.” Ralph always included himself with his master.

“ And you’ve some charming neighbours, eh, Ralph ? ” he said, with a sly twinkle in his eye. “ You’ll have to take care of the master.”

“ Well, sir,” said Ralph, “ I’ve taken care of him all these years, but there’s no knowing what may happen to a man when once

he gets the female folk about him. They do twist and turn a man about ;” and Ralph looked rather sad as he said this.

“ Why, Ralph, I shall begin to think you are bitten yourself, you are so serious about it, and we shall be having you and the master both married.”

“ Not I,” said Ralph, who had been considerably “ twisted and turned,” as he expressed it, by Mary, but whose supremacy he was not going to acknowledge even to himself. “ Not I. I keep clear of them, thank God !”

When the young men were alone, Valentine began talking of Kate again, and Lord Medway, instead of stopping him this time, encouraged him. He did not know that there was any connection between Kate and Flora. There had been so many scandals connected with Arundel Lifton that it did

not occur to him that this particular one had anything to do with Flora. Besides, he imagined that Kate's mother must by this time be a middle-aged woman, and he always thought of "Arun's pretty widow" as a young woman. He saw that Arun was very much taken with Kate, and he fancied that he might perhaps forget the widow if he was encouraged to think of Kate. So they discussed her merits and beauty in somewhat horsey language, perhaps, as young men are apt to do when they admire horses and women indiscriminately, and have never learnt to regard either seriously.

"And what did you think of the other woman?" said Lord Medway presently.

"Temple's sister, wasn't she? I couldn't quite make out the relationship between them. That's one of those things, you know, I never can make out."

“You’ll make out what relation she is to you, though, when I tell you,” said Lord Medway.

“Relation to me ! ’Pon honour, I know nothing about her. What do you mean, you know ?”

“What I mean is that she is Arundel Lif-ton’s wife—your cousin’s wife.”

“The wife of that infernal scamp ? By Jove ! I say, you know, you must be chaffing me, Charlie.”

“No, Val, honour bright, the pater has been telling me all about it to-night. I didn’t know he was married.”

“I knew he had been married, and left his wife years ago, before I can remember, don’t you know ? but I didn’t know who she was, or whether she was alive. I say, Charlie, ain’t it a shame ?”

“What’s a shame ?” said Charlie.

“Why, to leave that splendid creature, you know. ’Pon honour, if he wasn’t such a cool devil, I’d like to thrash him, you know. But there’s no managing him. He’s a regular fiend. What did he leave her for?”

“Oh! as usual, to run off with another fellow’s wife. He took her brother’s wife, on that occasion, and the two deserted ones have lived together ever since, and brought up the girl that has taken your fancy to-night.”

Now, Lord Arun’s brain did not move very quickly, and he began slowly turning all this over in his mind, as he undressed and got into bed, and occasionally he jerked out questions to Charlie, which did not seem to have any connection.

“How old is she?” he shouted to Charlie, in the other room.

“Who?” said Charlie.

"Why, Miss Temple, don't you know?"

"Eighteen, I should think."

After a few minutes' silence, Valentine shouted again.

"What became of her?"

"Why, went home and went to bed, I should say."

"No, I don't mean that, you know. I mean, don't you see, what did that scoundrel do with her when he took her away?"

"What, Lifton you mean? Oh, you'd better ask him. Got a good many to account for, I should say. A regular Blue Beard, only didn't marry 'em first, as the other monster did."

"I say, Charlie," said Val, after he had been in bed some minutes, "what was the name of Temple's wife, maiden name, you know?"

"Temple's wife be hanged, Val, and you too! Do go to sleep, like a Christian. I'd just got off."

But Val did not go to sleep. He had begun to work the question out in his mind, and it flashed upon him that Flora was Kate's mother. And he was not happy about it. Kate seemed to him a contemporary of his own, for a girl of eighteen is equal to a boy of twenty-two; and it seemed impossible that the fairy-like Flora, with her pretty face and yellow hair, could be nearly old enough to be his mother. Then the jokes of some of his friends about her age came to his mind; and then he thought of the fresh and pure Kate. Val thought over it for hours. He had never had such a thinking fit in his life. He woke up in the morning a sadder and a wiser man. He was no longer in love, but he was full of pity for the woman whose life had been so wrecked. He pictured her a fresh young girl, as Kate now was, falling into the snares of a fiend,

like Arundel Lifton. He had always been rather frightened of his cousin, but he had no fear now ; he determined to face him, and compel him to join him in taking means to make the life of poor little Flora less miserable.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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